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Gnome Charity Appeal

by W.F. Deedes

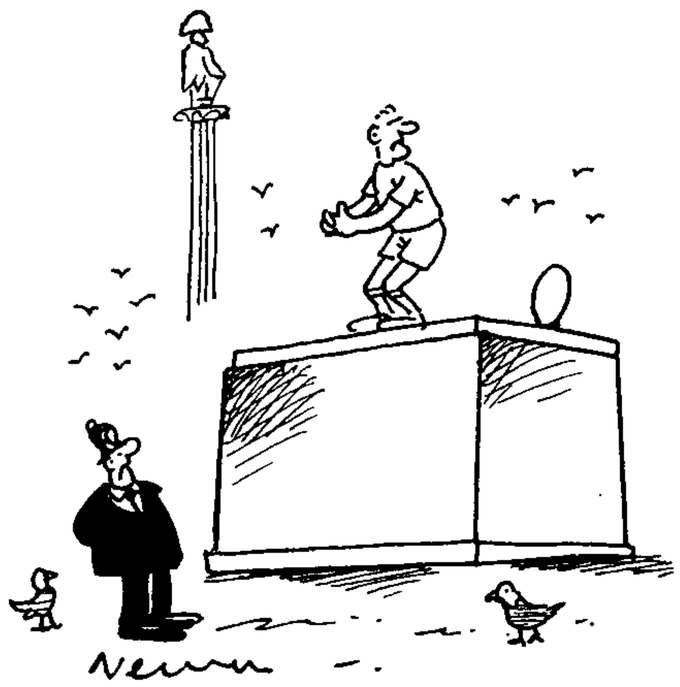
AS CUSTOMARY with the approach of Christmas, we at the Telegraph are making our charitable appeal for the poor and needy. This year we focus on the case of poor Conrad, a Canadian refugee, who is in desperate need of £250 million.

Already, Conrad has had to sell his two private jets to pay back the money he took from his company. His wife Barbara is down to her last one hundred pairs of shoes and has been forced out to make a living writing pieces for the Daily Telegraph.

As the season of goodwill approaches, we appeal to all our readers to dig deep into their pockets to help stop poor Conrad spending a bleak Christmas in jail.

- **£5 will buy him a miniature model of Napoleon**
- **£19.99 will buy a copy of his hugely boring book on F.D. Roosevelt**
- **£250 million will buy him out of trouble**

Send your donations now to:
W.F. Deedes,
The Telegraph Christmas Appeal,
Go Back To Canada House,
In-The-Docklands, EC1.



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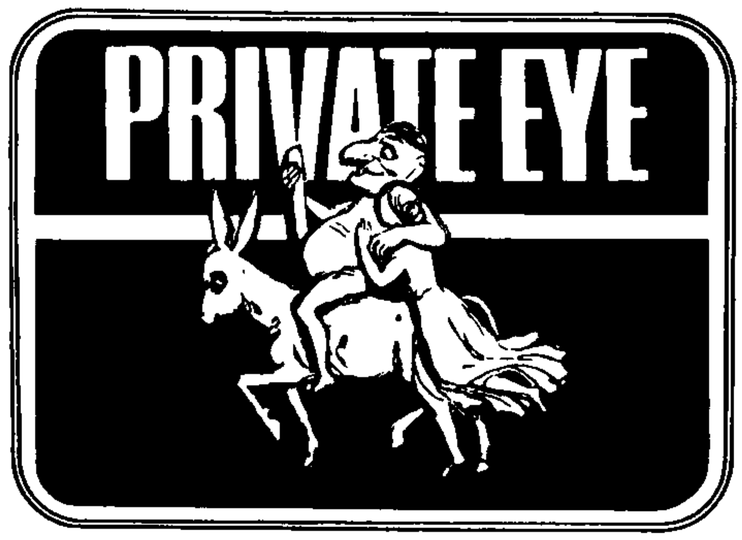

Bleating about the Bush

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THE THINGS THEY SAY

"TO think that the comparison is real you have to believe that there is some chance that we – or I in particular – are sitting here doing things that could lead straight to a jail cell... My treatment of minority shareholders and my financial ethics have never been questioned."

So said outraged former asset stripper Conrad Black 11 years ago when he was keen to distance himself from any comparison with pension plunderer Robert Maxwell. This was ahead of the sale of shares in the Telegraph when City critics were already labelling his Hollinger newspaper empire as in need of cash.

Well, as they say, that was then and this is now. Those 1992 statements of boardroom probity look rather empty with the revelation last week that Black had paid himself and his close aides almost half of the $32m in undisclosed and unauthorised payments which have forced his resignation as Hollinger International chief executive and signalled the probable break up of his empire to pay off its pressing debts.

● See *In the City*, page 28

JOINED UP GOVERNMENT

14 November: Foreign secretary announces that the number of British troops in Iraq will be "significantly increased" if needed.

16 November: MoD orders recruitment freeze on army ahead of white paper which will "streamline" armed forces.

COURT OUT

THE security row that blew up after an undercover *Mirror* hack got a job as a royal footman and wandered freely through the private apartments at Buckingham Palace, was not the only security embarrassment last week.

Happily, though, no one in President George Bush's massive security entourage twigged that most of the liveried waiters at Wednesday's state banquet at the palace were... unvetted students from catering colleges, hired for the night.

Meanwhile, Buck House is set to challenge Downing Street's assumption that Number Ten should host a reception for the victorious England world cup rugby team (coincidentally providing a perfect photo op for an embattled prime minister).

A memo from the palace will point out that the Queen is still (notionally) head of state and offer its own facilities instead (coincidentally providing a perfect photo opportunity for an embattled Brenda).

As Downing Street is unlikely to back down, Martin Johnson & Co look set to have to endure two receptions instead of one.

● See *Court Circular*, page 5

JUST FANCY THAT

EARLIER this month, as the court of auditors in Luxembourg prepared to refuse to pass the European Union's accounts for the ninth year running and again criticised book-keeping at the commision, another gathering of bean-counters was taking place in London.

At the *Accountancy Age* Awards 2003, voted for by readers of the magazine, EC whistleblower Marta Andreasen (*Eyes passim*) was presented with the personality of the year award. The prize comes more than 18 months after she was suspended by commissioner Neil Kinnock after speaking out about errors and loopholes in the EU's accounting systems which, she said, made fraud easy.

Unfortunately Mr Kinnock was unable to attend the ceremony (or to offer his congratulations).

THE EXPERTS' EXPERT

"I believe the Kiwis will turn over the Wallabies, just, while the French will beat our chaps. I backed France to win this tournament at 7/1 (they were recently 14/1 – how clever I am) and they've peaked at the right time."

— James Whitaker, *Daily Mirror*, 15 November, on the eve of the rugby world cup semi-finals.

STATE VISIT SHOCK

Street of Shame

THE resignation of Conrad Black last Monday after an internal investigation revealed he and other Hollinger executives had been dipping their hands in the till to the tune of £19m was greeted with a mixture of delight and blind panic at the *Daily Telegraph*.

Especially annoyed was features editor Richard Preston, who had spent much of his weekend putting together a lengthy and hard-hitting piece on white collar crime in the wake of the US securities and exchange commission's expansion of its enforcement division. With a general "don't mention the war" policy in place on the paper, Preston was forced to spike his own work and revert to the usual pictures of barely-dressed starlets.

Editor Martin Newland meanwhile saw the fact that his boss may face criminal charges and is certainly looking to sell off the paper as no reason to stop brown-nosing to him, and devoted 1,000 words of *arslikhan* to Black's "monumental, affectionate and entertaining biography of Franklin D. Roosevelt" in Wednesday's arts section. As John Keegan concluded: "It is one of the funniest and cleverest essays in the analysis of American politics ever written."

ALTHOUGH *Sunday Telegraph* City editor Robert Peston was away last week, he nevertheless managed to write an "apologia" for the complete absence of analysis or commentary on "the most gripping financial story of the moment", the investigation of Conrad Black.

Peston argued that there were "obvious" conflicts of interest in a paper opining about its own proprietor (though these don't seem to have prevented Black's titles from running sycophantic pieces about his biography of FDR). So, he announced feebly, "we have excluded ourselves from the field of play – which is extremely painful, since for a financial commentator it's the equivalent of choosing not to play in the Rugby World Cup final".

Peston also explained why an alternative approach had been rejected. "We could simply rehash the published facts – but that would be dull and would probably repeat what you have already read during the week." Yet as Peston well knows, during the week most *Sunday Telegraph* subscribers take the *Daily Telegraph*, which has imposed a similar self-denying ordinance on proper coverage of the Blackadder scandal. So the implicit message of his "apologia" is that *Torygraph* readers who actually want to know what's going on should cancel their orders and buy a rival paper instead!

THE most ingenious analysis of the Conrad Black saga comes from Melanie Phillips, aka Mel P ("Very Scary Spice"), who has written an article for the *Wall Street Journal Europe* explaining why Lord Blackadder's downfall received so much coverage and prompted such "glee" and "gloating".

"Of course, it is natural that a story about possible substantial corporate error or (for those who want to believe the worst) corruption should be a big news event," she concedes. "Nevertheless, there is more than a whiff of something else steaming pungently from this welter of coverage."

Students of Mel P's work will already have guessed what that something else might be. There is, she reveals, a "snobbish, disdainful, anti-American, anti-Israel and even anti-Jewish philosophy lying behind the general triumphalism over the humbling of Lord Black [which] is – distressingly – very much a British phenomenon".

Of course it could just be that other British phenomenon of enjoying the sight of a bombastic bully getting his comeuppance: wasn't there similar glee at the downfall of Jeffrey Archer? But Phillips refuses to consider the possibility. Although Black himself isn't Jewish, he is being punished for "his papers' staunch defence of Israel" and for publishing articles by Barbara Amiel – "which is considered intolerable not just because she is the proprietor's wife but, far worse, because she is a Jew".

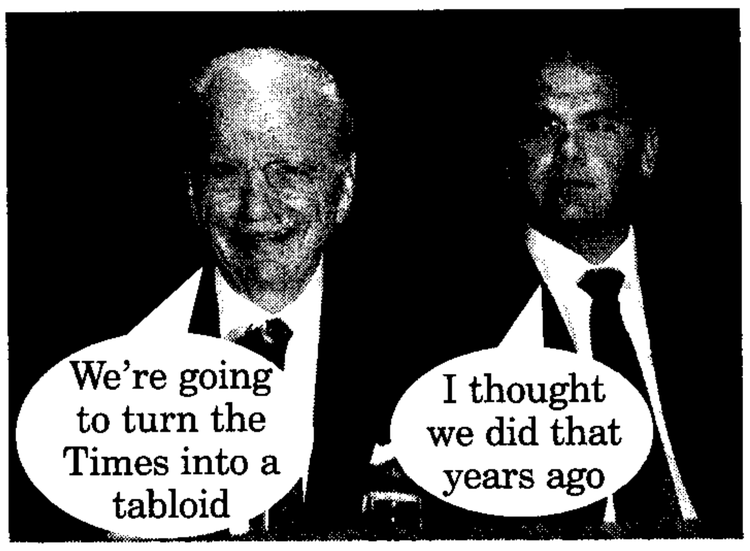
ACCOMPANYING George Bush on his trip to London last week was the extremely hawkish Pentagon adviser Richard Perle. Since he also happens to be one of milord Black's appointees to the board of Hollinger International, Perle's arrival was greeted with a predictably grovelling interview in the *Daily Telegraph*.

The paper was happy to note that he had just been cleared of any conflict of interest arising from the fact that he chaired the Pentagon's defence policy board while also earning $750,000 consultancy fees from Global Crossing, a bankrupt telecom firm that was lobbying the Pentagon not to block its sale to a Chinese company. Perle resigned his chairmanship in March but continued to serve on the board.

Alas, the *Telegraph* rejoiced too soon. For Perle has now walked straight into another financial investigation. And the name of the company involved? Er, Hollinger.

As well as examining the notorious "management fees" paid to Conrad Blackadder, the American securities and exchange commission (SEC) is looking into a $2.5m payment made by Hollinger Digital, the company's venture capital arm, to Trireme Partners, a company which invests in the defence and homeland-security sectors. By a happy coincidence, Perle is in the unique position of being a director of Hollinger Digital, a managing partner of Trireme, and a member of one of the key government bodies influencing defence spending. A further $14m that Hollinger invested in venture capital firm Hillman Capital is also being investigated by the SEC. Hillman is run by Gerald Hillman who, as luck would have it, is a partner in Trireme and a member of the defence policy board.

MURDOCH SHOCK



MOST reports of Michael Howard's first prime minister's questions as Tory leader prominently featured quotes from his "dossier" on Tony Blair's past pronouncements.

"We can talk about the time he criticised America's state-sponsored terrorism – I wonder if he will be raising that with President Bush next week. Or we can talk about the time that he praised the fortitude and resolve of the Wapping strikers. I bet that he does not remind Rupert Murdoch of that."

Oddly enough, coverage in the *Times* (prop: R. Murdoch) featured a glaring omission from the quote, stopping dead after the mention of Wapping strikers. It then skipped ahead to the next paragraph, rather spoiling Mr Howard's neat rhetorical repetition.

Did parliamentary correspondent Greg Hurst have difficulty deciphering his shorthand, one wonders. Or are even benign references to the proprietor now erased?

AFTER years of preliminary skirmishes, the epic "porn wars" lawsuit brought by Richard Desmond against his former chief smutwallah Deric Botham was due to reach the high court next month. Last week, however, Dirty Des suddenly decided to drop the case. The decision will land him with a six-figure bill for legal costs.

Sources in the Dirty Des empire point out that only a couple of days earlier they had at last received a copy of Botham's witness statement – which amply bore out his threat to "sing like a canary" about how Desmond runs his porn operations. One of Desmond's lawyers told a colleague that he had read it "with mounting horror".

It was a clear that at next month's hearing a lot of dirty linen would be presented in open court – perhaps even literally, since Des's jazzmags sometimes offer genuine used knickers to their readers. And all this would occur at the very moment when Desmond is striving to present himself as a highly respectable media mogul who would make a most suitable owner for the *Daily Telegraph*. Hence the hasty retreat.

Will this be enough to prevent bankers and politicians from realising that Dirty Des is indeed a pornographer? We shall see.

HOW does Anthony Holden – journalist, royal expert, poker ace and governor of the South Bank Centre – find time in his busy schedule to file classical music reviews for the *Observer* as well?

His review last month of Cecilia Bartoli's recital at the Royal Opera House suggests he is not averse to using the odd *ostinato* to save time.

Mozarts *Ch'io mi scordi di te*, he reported, was turned "into a high-tariff gymnastic feat amid some sort of vocal Olympics"; mixing his sports metaphors he moved on to criticise Bartoli's "strenuous body language; she grimaces, hunches her shoulders and launches into a coloratura run like a weightlifter going for a world record."

At least Holden can't be accused of inconsistency: when he last reviewed a Bartoli performance in November 2002, he wrote that "much of the evening seemed more like a sporting than a musical event, with the dynamic diva going for gold in baroque coloratura with high-tariff arias requiring dazzling displays of vocal dexterity – not always a pretty sight, involving grimaces and gestures reminiscent of an Olympic weightlifter."

STAFF at the *Mail on Sunday* were puzzled recently when deputy editor Rod "Mad" Gilchrist, who was editing the paper that week, ordered the chief sub to devote four pages to a piece extolling the virtues of the La Residencia Hotel in Majorca.

But the penny dropped when they discovered that Rod had written the article himself. It was just his way of saying a big thank-you to Elegant Resorts for his lavish freebie holiday there – when a mere reader's family wouldn't have got much change from £10,000.

"I always travel with this company," Gilchrist gushed, "because from the personal greeting you receive at the airport from their representatives through to the service at your hotel, they ensure their clients receive the best." Oh yes, indeed.

HATS off to the *Daily Mail* for its latest scare: "Drinking bottled water may be increasing tooth decay among children."

From this readers might assume there is something in mineral water that is as bad for teeth as fizzy, sugary drinks. But no. It is simply that researchers have found that water in Newcastle upon Tyne, where the local water is fluoridated, have found that children consume less fluoride if they don't drink the tap water. Brilliant.

Different Churches had differing "entry points" on the issue of human sexuality, and their discussion could be "mutually inspiring".

Church Times

PRINCESS Diana's former chef Darren McGrady recently broke his silence to attack his old colleague Paul Burrell in the *Mail on Sunday*.

"I have remained silent about everything that went on at the palace, honouring a pact Burrell and I made never to divulge her secrets," he wrote. "But now I am so angered and disgusted about his lies, shameless distortions of the truth and despicable peddling of her most intimate confidences for money that I feel honourbound to speak out." He added that even when she was alive the princess suspected Burrell of "leaking stories to the newspapers".

What the noble chef omits to mention is that he did so too. In the mid-1990s, via a journalistic friend, McGrady gave lots of titbits about Diana to the *Mail on Sunday*'s magazine *YOU*, which was forever running Di-related special features and partworks. Indeed he actually provided more material than even *YOU* could use, so his journalist chum then started passing some of the stories to Fiona Wingett of the *Sunday Mirror*, who produced a series of front-page splashes revealing that Diana wanted to marry the surgeon Hasnat Khan, Diana intended to move to California with McGrady and Burrell, and so on.

McGrady was offered a job by Michael Heseltine after Diana died but decided instead to work for a tycoon in Texas, where he remains. But he kept in touch with his journalist friend, whom he asked to act as his literary agent. McGrady's plan was to write a book called *A Royal Chef in Your Kitchen*, in which recipes would be interspersed with gossip about the eating habits of Diana and other royals.

Imagine the friend's surprise when, a few months ago, he received an email from McGrady saying he was now talking to three other agents about the book (one in New York, the others in Dallas), and asking if the hack could come up with a better offer than theirs. And imagine his even greater surprise when he opened the *Mail on Sunday* and found the selfsame Darren McGrady vilifying Paul Burrell for committing the unforgivable sin of cashing in on his royal experiences!

IN THE *Guardian* last week, Dawn Hayes asked "Are we seeing a new, more humble internet era emerging?"

Can this be the same Dawn Hayes who left *Sunday Business* a few years ago, declaring that the printed word was dead and traditional publications were dinosaurs that would soon be extinct (and good riddance too)? She then joined online newspaper the451.com (451 being the temperature at which paper burns) to work with fellow-hacks convinced that they were about to inherit the earth in a major "paradigm shift".

The fact that she now deigns to write for a traditional newspaper shows that at least one internet triumphalist has indeed eaten humble pie.

roast chicken salad
Now with roast chicken
M&S label

HACKWATCH

Idol Thoughts

LAUNCHING his new TV series *The Importance of Being Famous*, Piers Moron attacks the "media-fuelled vacuum of C-grade celebrity nonsense". In the "strange, fame-gripped state our nation is now in", even also-rans from *Pop Idol* are thought newsworthy. "What is wrong with us?" he asks. "We are... getting so obsessed by these people laughably called stars that we are developing quite scary levels of celebrity psychosis".

Well, there's nothing wrong with Piers, thank God. Last week he boasted that the *Daily Mirror* now ignores "Jordan, Jodie, Jade, Alicia, Tara, Lady Victoria" et cetera, as part of his campaign against witless celebrities. "I won't win it, like most of my *Mirror* campaigns recently, but, as with Iraq, I will console myself with the knowledge that I was surely right."

So how successful is his celeb-shunning policy? Here are just 10 days' worth of *Daily Mirror* stories...

10 November: The front page is dominated by an "exclusive" report that Kylie Minogue seems to have found happiness with French boyfriend Olivier Martinez. But Kylie insists that wedding bells are still some way off. The whole of page three is cleared for the news that Liz Hurley wore green wellies when she went shopping at a garden centre in Gloucestershire with boyfriend Arun Nayar. Other top stories: failed *Pop Idol* contestant Kym Gee says she is "relieved" to be out of the TV talent show; former lap-dancer Jodie Marsh displayed the top of her thong at a London party; Jordan lowered her skirt at a party in Dublin; and one of Jordan's ex-boyfriends "made a beeline" for former *Brookside* babe Jennifer Ellison at the Mosquito Club in Liverpool.

11 November: Kylie Minogue will no longer flaunt her famous bottom, the *Mirror* reveals. She will keep her clothes on to promote her new album, *Body Language*. The paper also breaks the news that Pete Brame, who came fourth on the TV show *Fame Academy*, has been dumped by his girlfriend, kids' TV presenter Fearne Cotton. "Due to pressures, Peter decided to move out for a while," a friend says. "They are just going to take things day by day. But he has definitely moved out. Read into that what you will."

12 November: Tara Palmer-Tomkinson suffered "a terrifying security scare" when someone tried to break into her London flat this week, but fortunately the intruder failed to get in. "We've just had top-of-the-range security put in," explains flatmate Matt Jolly. Meanwhile, telly babe Tamzin Outhwaite kept everyone guessing about her love life at a London showbiz premiere this week. "I'm not saying if I'm single or not," grinned Tamzin, who was cruelly jilted by long-term lover Steve "Da Force" Ellington earlier this year. The party animal topped off her evening with some posh Argentinian nosh and more booze with celeb pals Liam Gallagher, Nicole Appleton and Kate Thornton.

13 November: Glamour girl Jodie Marsh has attended a concert by retro-rockers The Darkness. Jodie, 24, reveals that she loves the band so much she is wearing a thong emblazoned with their name. Elsewhere in the paper, there's a two-page interview with Holly Valance, who appears in adverts for Freeserve's new Internet advice line. "Image is important," discloses the Aussie-born beauty, "but it's all about getting the right package. I can't rely on being raunchy to carry my career."

14 November: A scorching scoop: Ulrika Jonsson claims she did Nancy Dell'Olio a favour by having a fling with Sven Goran Eriksson. "She is well known now, something she enjoys," says Ulrika, 36, now pregnant by D-list celeb Lance Gerrard-Wright. "I was probably the best thing that happened to her." On another page there is news of Jodie Marsh's feud with Jordan. Says former lap-dancer Jodie: "I would rather make up with the bullies who tormented me and made my life hell at school than Jordan. We will never see eye to eye. She hated me as soon as I came on the scene and was jealous because she had competition... We don't like each other. Let's face it, we have nothing in common."

17 November: Another "exclusive": Pete Waterman believes *Pop Idol* will be "a joke" if 15-stone Michelle McManus wins. "It's like thinking she could be the next supermodel," fumes Pete, 57, who is tipping Susanne or Sam to win. Michelle is, however, backed by Mr Nasty Simon Cowell. Other news: Denise van Outen has been seen shopping in Hennes, Covent Garden.

18 November: An "exclusive" news report, filling most of a page, reveals that Sienna Miller has a problem to get off her chest. "I've lost weight and my boobs have gone, they're just clinging on for dear life," the 21-year-old beauty confides. "I want tits and an arse. I would love to be voluptuous, but I've just always been skinny. I think it would be wonderful to have curves." Elsewhere, the *Mirror* reports that Lady Victoria Hervey is bouncing back from the demise of her designer clothes shop by setting up a new business in America with Milla Jovovich. "She and Milla became really good friends at London Fashion Week," confides a pal, "and have decided to open a shop on LA."

19 November: Matt Jay of new band Busted "has started acting like a real pop star", we learn. As a charming photo reveals, he was seen "manhandling lap-dancer Tiger in Stringfellows on Monday". There's also a two-page interview with former *Popstars* contestant Myleene Klass. "I haven't had the best times with men," she discloses. "To be honest, I have made lots of mistakes. I think I went for older men and I suppose I was vulnerable." And, as the *Mirror* sensationally reveals, she sometimes eats takeaways!

Court Circular

IT WAS Tony Blair who advised the Queen to seek an injunction against the *Mirror* after an undercover reporter got a job as a footman and splashed photographs of the royal apartments all over the paper.

A reluctant Brenda was pushed into agreement by the Duke of Edinburgh and Prince Charles, who since the recent allegations of flunkey-pumpy at St James's Palace has become more determined to challenge the press.

Ryan Parry, the footman/reporter who had found the vacancy advertised on the royal website, was clearly liked by his colleagues in the palace. He played his hand well: even those servants who get the odd bung for feeding the tabloids stories didn't suspect him of being a hack.

That he made friends and networked well is beyond doubt. For no footman could have had uninterrupted access to so many quarters and had time to take pictures and note details without assistance. Those who were once thought to be Parry's friends at Buck House are now keeping their heads down.

Brenda issued personal bollockings to her private secretary Sir Robin Janvrin, along with Lord Luce, the lord chamberlain, and Tom Blackburn, the master of the household.

'Flunkey'

LUVVIES

Halle Berry appears in most of the film [Gothika] with matted hair and no make-up and broke her arm during an emotionally charged scene with Downey. "I saw her psyching herself into a hell space that was so brave for her to go there," recalls Downey. "It was exhausting just to watch."

USA Today

Submitted by David James.

An occasional column devoted to gems from the acting profession. £10 paid for entries.

IN THE TEAROOM

YOU have to hand it to them. The faultless display of unity and discipline the Tories laid on for the media following the accession of Michael Howard to the leadership was impressive. All the more impressive for being so utterly insincere.

Howard was never particularly popular among colleagues in IDS's shadow cabinet. Now that he's bruised so many egos by downgrading their status to "shadow- secretary-outside-the shadow cabinet" – or excluding them altogether – he's fast growing more unpopular still.

Imagine how you'd feel if you were, say, Damian Green. The former education spokesman was one of the few stars to shine under IDS. His policy of opposing university fees was the only initiative that can actually be shown to have increased the party's standing in the opinion polls. His reward? Not only has he been switched to boring old transport, but he has to play second fiddle to Theresa May. Humiliating or what?

Some of the walking wounded have consoled themselves over the past weeks with the thought that Howard wouldn't be around for too long anyhow. He was a mere stop-gap. A caretaker. Their day would soon come. But now the new leader has taken to schmoozing backbenchers in the smoking room, trying to build-up a real popularity base in parliament. That can mean only one thing: Howard's in for the long haul. He really wants to be prime minister and won't be handing over the reins to anyone after the next election.

This uncomfortable fact has become apparent to everyone except Howard's closest crony, Liam Fox. The new half-a-party-chairman has taking to strutting around like an heir presumptive. He seems still to think that the new leader is only there to smooth his own path to greatness, poor sap. He'll be brought down to earth with a thump when his better half, Lord Saatchi, finally gets round to explaining (with Howard's full authority) that Fox's role is purely ornamental – Liam is there to make glib statements to the media, while he (Saatchi) runs the party machine.

So the mutinous muttering has begun. In the tearoom they're regretting aloud that Howard appears such a poor judge of character. "Imagine bringing in a decidedly iffy sort like Guy Black as communications director," they complain. "But he comes with the highest recommendations from Lord Wakeham," counters a foolish optimist. Yeah, and so did stock in Enron.

'Urquhart'

Number crunchings

£30,000

■ Cost of flying minister Richard Caborn back from Australia for foundation hospitals vote

£30,000

■ Annual salary for two enrolled nurses

THUGGISH health secretary John Reid has a reputation for straight-talking and a predilection for turning the air blue. So much so that many of his department of health staff even hope he'll take up cigarettes again to calm him down.

Unfortunately for them and anyone else who crosses his path, "the Hammer" has found a new verbal barrage in which he accuses anyone with the temerity of opposing foundation hospitals as being "against the working class".

Since Reid spent some of his formative years in the hard-line Communist party, his choice of words is little surprise. But could Reid's increasingly intemperate manner have anything to do with a spot of local difficulty? Under boundary changes the health secretary's Lanarkshire seat disappears at the next election and Reid could find himself without a berth.

Rumours abound in Scotland that the new Glasgow Central seat could be squared, especially as Reid's old enemy George Galloway is temporarily out of the picture. But could help be at hand in the shape of Rosemary McKenna whose Cumbernauld constituency Reid is eyeing up? If a place could by found for McKenna in the House of Lords, everyone would be happy, wouldn't they?

"I'd like a second opinion"

THE government strenuously denies that it is allowing the British-owned island of Diego Garcia in the Indian Ocean to be used by the Americans to hold al Qaeda suspects and Iraqi prisoners before they are sent on to Camp X Ray on Guantanamo Bay in Cuba.

Former foreign office minister Baroness Amos denied point blank the claim of veteran Labour backbencher Tam Dalyell that the island was being used to hold prisoners in contravention of British law. Dalyell had been moved to act after reading an authoritative report in the *Washington Post* that had made this claim. But now it comes courtesy of *Time* Magazine too – that Riduan Isamuddin, otherwise known as Hambali, accused of being operations chief behind the Bali and other bombings, is being held on Diego Garcia by the Americans.

Thus far all questions from MPs and peers about Diego Garcia being used for the "rendering" of suspects before they are moved to Camp X Ray are either denied of fobbed off. Could it be the government is embarrassed that British law on the island is being flouted by holding suspects without charge?

PS: The former inhabitants of Diego Garcia last year won a high court ruling allowing them to return to their homeland 30 years after Britain leased most of the island to the American military and threw them off with it with no compensation.

PPS: The islanders have still not been able to return, refused entry by the American military on "security grounds". Some of them were last spotted forlornly sporting their national flag – the Union Jack – in the rain outside the Commons. It's as close to Diego Garcia as they are likely to get.

YOU might be forgiven for expecting the department for work and pensions (DWP) to try to set a good example to employers of how to treat staff. But you'd be mistaken.

The pay and conditions package, imposed last week despite objections from the civil servants' union, includes new rules for the performance-related bonus scheme. The scheme now penalises staff who take any time off outside their official holiday leave – including sickness, jury service or even attending a family funeral.

In fact, when the union queried the loss of bonuses for taking time out following the death of a close family member, management clarified that "exceptional compassionate absences" would be exempt. However, on further questioning, DWP bosses would not class the death of someone's child or partner as "exceptional" and indeed could give no example of such an exception.

THE firm pushing hardest to run the government's ID card scheme is SchlumbergerSema, whose poor treatment of benefit seekers was recently highlighted by the national audit office (NAO).

SchlumbergerSema has been lobbying parliament in favour of ID cards via an article in *The House* magazine, which is circulated to MPs, and by commissioning opinion polls that apparently show most Britons want the cards. The firm doesn't have an ID card contract yet, but it did make mock-up smart cards last Christmas for home secretary David Blunkett. A spokesperson tells the *Eye* its lobbying on ID cards is "speculative" but it feels it has a strong chance of winning work on Blunkett's pet project.

Schlumberger is a past donor to the Labour party and has run Labour's membership database. At this year's party conference it paid for an Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) meeting with cabinet office minister Douglas Alexander and Tony Blair's adviser Matthew Taylor.

THE Libra project to computerise magistrates' courts (*Eyes passim*) is, says a report from the public accounts committee (PAC), "one of the worst PFI deals we have seen". And that's saying something.

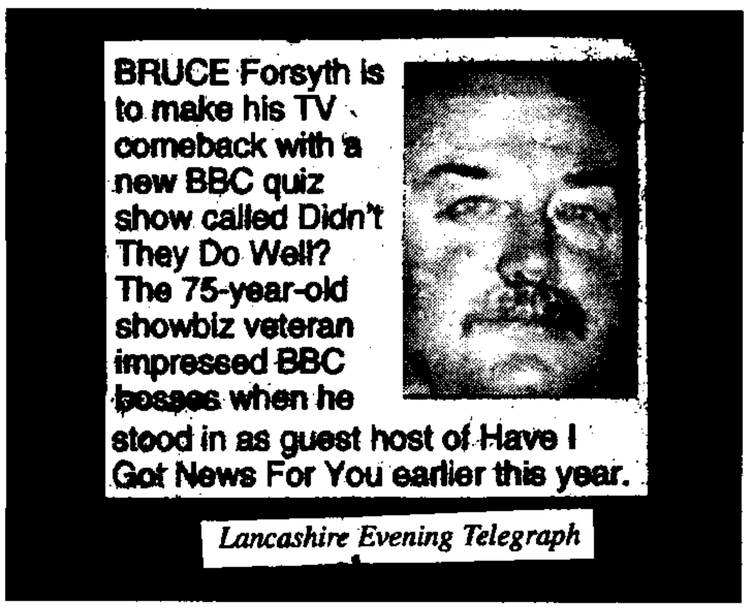
While the cost of the deal has risen from £156m to £390m, Fujitsu, the firm behind it, is now offering less in return for more. It was originally going to run the computers for 11 years, but now only promises 8.5 years of work. This may, however, be a relief to magistrates as the computers still do not work, even though £232m has already been paid.

This is an embarrassment not just for Geoff Hoon who signed the deal but for Labour generally: Fujitsu sponsored the Business Centre and Internet Café at this year's party conference; and in the past it has paid for the entire conference programme of the IPPR Labour think tank.

The Tories, though, are unlikely to make much of a fuss about the scandal. Westminster Tory MP Mark Fisher's research assistant runs a PR firm with one client: Fujitsu. And Michael Portillo lists payment for speaking at a "Fujitsu dinner" on the register of members' interests.

PS: In December the Inland Revenue will announce who has won its "Aspire" competition to run all its IT services. As *Eye* readers know, the race is between the pisspoor and the even worse: EDS/Accenture, Cap Gemini Ernst & Young – and hopeless Fujitsu.

But don't panic. The matter is in the safest possible hands. Paymaster-general "Red" Dawn Primarolo told the Commons on 6 November: "The board of the Inland Revenue has set up a superintending group to oversee the work of Aspire which is chaired by Sir Nicholas Montagu KCB, the chairman of the Inland Revenue." (And, she might have added, serial deceiver of Parliament.)


BRUCE Forsyth is to make his TV comeback with a new BBC quiz show called Didn't They Do Well? The 75-year-old showbiz veteran impressed BBC bosses when he stood in as guest host of Have I Got News For You earlier this year.
Lancashire Evening Telegraph

THE national audit office (NAO) is finally to investigate the pisspoor running of Britain's bail hostels by Anglian Water's AWG Facilities Services, formerly known as Morrisons.

For more than a year the Eye has catalogued the disasters after cooks, cleaners and maintenance services were privatised while the cost to taxpayers has virtually doubled. Most hostels are having to pay an average £50,000 to £60,000 a year more. Avon and Somerset has seen a massive increase from £125,000 to £440,000 (more than 250 percent) and Hampshire's costs have rocketed from £180,000 to £460,000 (150 percent).

In the summer Anglian and the home office promised probation staff that a shake-up of the service would bring "greater support both in terms of operational and administrative delivery" in a move towards "excellence in service". They were empty promises.

Harry Fletcher, of the probation union Napo, has been logging the latest fiascos.

Cooks travelled from Tunbridge Wells in Kent to cater for residents at the Brighton hostel in Sussex... while a cook from Eastbourne in Sussex travelled to, er, Maidstone in Kent.

A carpenter from Portsmouth was sent to fit a boiler in London, while one of Sheffield's hostels was sent a boilerman to repair a roof.

A hostel in Weymouth, Dorset, has received no fewer than six visits to repair a shower. But none of the electricians or carpenters who turned up could do the work.

Other hostels have gone without cleaners or have lacked for food or bedding; and at two hostels in Kent residents became angry and disturbed when no cooks showed up and they had no food at all.

How long before the NAO wakes up to this blatant waste or taxpayers' money?

Number crunchings

230

■ Number of specialist sports schools set up under New Labour

213

■ Number of school playing fields New Labour have allowed to be sold off

NATIONAL 'TRUST'

READ reports of the National Trust's agm in the Times and Guardian, and you might be forgiven for thinking that a majority of trust members voted in favour of developing 191 homes on trust land at the Cliveden estate in Buckinghamshire (see *Eyes* passim).

Certainly the trust managed to vote down the motion from members who are also residents in nearby Taplow, where the parish council has been campaigning against the planned development on a piece of land in the middle of inalienable greenbelt which is classified as brownfield because a military hospital was built there.

However, the postal votes tell a different story: 32,632 votes were received from members in favour of the villagers' resolution, defeating the 28,758 against. The vote was in fact swung by the chairman William Proby, who used his 19,094 discretionary votes (proxy votes for non-attending members who gave no instruction on which way they wanted him to vote) to push through the building plans.

HOLYROOD BOY

THE former Tory minister chosen to run the public inquiry into the continuing scandal of the rising cost of building the Scottish parliament has a colourful history.

Peter Fraser was Tory MP for Angus East until he lost his seat in 1987 and was ennobled as Lord Fraser of Carmyllie in 1989. He became lord advocate, the chief law officer in Scotland; and one of the big issues he had to deal with immediately was the 1988 Piper Alpha oil rig disaster in which 167 people were killed.

There was a pressing demand from relatives of the workers killed for a prosecution of the oil company involved, Occidental. Lord advocate Fraser refused a prosecution because the key witnesses had died in the disaster.

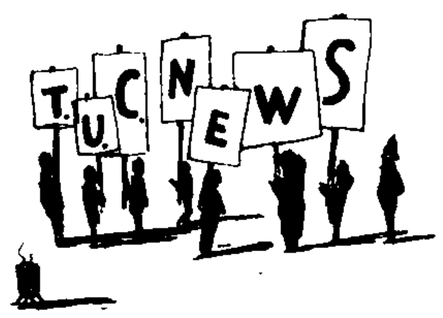
Gavin Cleland, whose 33-year-old son Robert died on Piper Alpha, petitioned the Scottish parliament in 2000 asking it to advise the current lord advocate to prosecute the companies involved. This petition was refused on the grounds that the parliament cannot advise the law officers on prosecutions.

In the year Lord Fraser turned the prosecution down (1991), the British operations of Occidental were taken over by the nationalised French oil company, Elf. When Elf was later privatised, its interests were partly taken over by Total. A prominent director of Total UK Holdings today is Lord Fraser of Carmyllie (who joined the company long after he was a minister).

The Total chairman is Charles Henderson, permanent secretary at the department of trade and industry when Lord Fraser was a minister there in charge of oil and gas in the mid-1990s.

Meanwhile at the Holyrood inquiry the full facts look set to elude Lord Fraser, as important papers remain mired in a legal action over £4m which were lost when a sub-contractor went bust. Contractor Bovis Landlease sub-contracted to Flour City Architectural UK Ltd, to supply the windows. Flour City had assets of just £2 in the UK but was awarded a £7m contract. Lo and behold, the contract collapsed, resulting in losses estimated at nearly £4m for Holyrood.

The Scottish auditor-general reported in September 2002 that there were "deficiencies in the selection, award and management procedures". This should have paved the way for possible legal action to recover the losses by the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body (SPCB), but it's only since the new Scottish parliament was elected that the SPCB has asked lawyers to draw up a plan to take Bovis to court. While legal action continues it has been decided the papers should not be made public. All of which means the Flour City fiasco will be off the inquiry's agenda.



GMB finances are looking more precarious than ever thanks to a combination of expensive sexual harassment cases and an inability to organise elections within the rules. With the union already carrying debts of £8m, its bankers have told it not to ask for any more credit.

Four GMB officials in Scotland have now received out-of-court settlements thanks to the behaviour of the union's former Scottish regional secretary, Robert "Bolly" Parker. This month the union agreed to pay £300,000 to Margaret McAvoy who, an employment tribunal ruled earlier this year, was sexually harassed by Parker while she worked as his personal assistant (*Eyes passim*).

The union's equality officer, Mary Senior, received £50,000 for victimisation she suffered after volunteering to give evidence on McAvoy's behalf. And last week Robert McGregor, a regional organiser, received £15,000 after GMB lawyers representing Parker in McAvoy's case were found to have falsely accused him of having had an affair with McAvoy in an attempt to smear her character.

Education officer Jim Millar also received a settlement after Parker froze his salary for the crime of voicing his support for Ms McAvoy. Bolly was forced out of office in March, but it is only now becoming clear that his antics have cost the GMB at least £1m is settlements and legal costs.

Many rank-and-file members wonder why Parker is still collecting his full salary (and will continue to do so until next March). They also wonder whether the union's general-secretary, Kevin Curran, is up to the job of guiding the GMB through these troubled times. In June he raised no objection when Lancashire regional secretary Gary Jones, a mate of Parker's, invited the disgraced Bolly to the union's annual congress in Blackpool.

Jones has himself now been found guilty of harassing a female colleague. On 18 November an employment tribunal in London ruled that he had both harassed and victimised Maxine Nixon, a GMB employee in Lancashire. Another hefty settlement and legal bill are in prospect.

'Blackleg'

POLICE 5

WITH coppers everywhere tied to their desks filling in forms or trapped in committee rooms rather than out on the beat, the national anti-bureaucracy taskforce is apparently stumped for ways to reduce paperwork.

Hence it has launched the National Bureaucracy Awards Scheme looking for ideas from officers and civilian staff. Suggestions are to be submitted using an "ideas template" which has been designed on the police internal website. Once the form is filled in it must be forwarded to the Police Federation or the home office. Each idea will be carefully considered by both organisations and the Association of Chief Police Officers, which will then select the best to go forward to a judging panel in May 2004.

Here's the *Eye*'s brilliant suggestion to cut bureaucracy: reduce the number of awards schemes involving website-building, form-filling and judging panels spread across several organisations.

The Victorian Society is the national amenity society campaigning for the needless destruction and alteration of our Victorian and Edwardian built heritage.

Victorian Society newsletter

EYE TV

Between The Sheets (ITV1)
Reversals (ITV1)

AMONG the scenes to be enjoyed in television drama last week were Brenda Blethyn inspecting her vagina with a mirror and Sarah Parrish pretending to have a penis.

You don't have to be on *Round Britain Quiz* to spot the connection between these dramatic moments. Television drama has gone sex-mad.

Some of this results from ratings desperation. The same multi-channel competitive frenzy which leads Channel 4 to run back-to-back docs about pornography has now spread to drama and has created a new genre of series: the concept soap. What has happened is that the broad, cartoonish tone of soap opera – and the emphasis on sex and relationships as the only stuff of life – is now applied to all fictional scripts, even in the kind of shows which would once have been regarded as rather tonier.

The first concept soap was *Footballers' Wives*, which used the classic storylines of the three-times-a-weekers – adultery, paternity doubts, sick children – but moved them away from terraced northern streets and fenced London squares and gave them a new playing field: premiership football. And, while traditional soap still tries to maintain a vague relationship with realism – tolerating the odd storyline about Aids or dyslexia – *Footballers' Wives* jettisoned any social comment at all and just went with the hermaphrodite babies and hostage dramas.

Between The Sheets is another perfect example of the genre. The basics of the plot are entirely Wetherfield or Albert Square. Peter and Hazel have been married a long time but Peter keeps having affairs and Hazel doesn't really like sex. Alona's partner is a probation officer who has got too close to a female client. You could easily imagine these storylines played out over half-an-hour, ending on a cliffhanger which brings in the thumpety-thump of the sig tune.

But what makes this a concept soap – and wins it the six one-hour slots at 9pm – is that Alona is a sex therapist whose clients include Hazel and Peter. What also marks it in that genre is that

Pandora's digital set-top box

everything is played for the broadest of laughs rather than any social or psychological realism.

Hazel's 78-year-old mum has discovered the joys of sex at the age of 78 when, as a recent widow, she met an old geezer played by Norman Wisdom. Now they're bonking twice a day and have just discovered cunnilingus. And whereas – on *EastEnders* – a scene in which Pauline Fowler inspected her vagina with a mirror would be sensitively played and followed by a phone-line number for National Know Her Body Week, here writer Kay Mellor presents it as Ortonesque farce, with the husband banging on the mysteriously locked bedroom door to talk about some herons he's just seen.

Reversals, an ITV1 one-off written by Tim Loane, was set in one of the most popular of all soap locations – a hospital – and touched in passing on an issue which has frequently featured in the medical series: the enthusiasm with which male gynaecologists remove wombs.

But because this was a concept soap, the plot involved Sarah Parrish, as a brilliant female medic denied preferment, taking revenge on her cheating male partner by dressing up in male drag and turning up early to take his place at the hospital where he's just got a new job. Her bloke then decided – like you do in a concept soap – to put on a blonde wig and breathy voice and go and take over her post at a teaching hospital. In real life, they would have been rumbled within minutes but the point of this form is mad exaggeration.

And, just as endless sex scenes were justified in *Between The Sheets* by the profession of a central character, so dating and seduction scenes which would have been drab and standard in a soap were here given a new twist by our knowledge of what lay behind the zips.

Television drama departments still maintain careful bureaucratic distinctions between films, series, serials and dramas – but there's increasingly little point. Whether soap or concept soap, it all comes from the same dish now.

'Remote Controller'

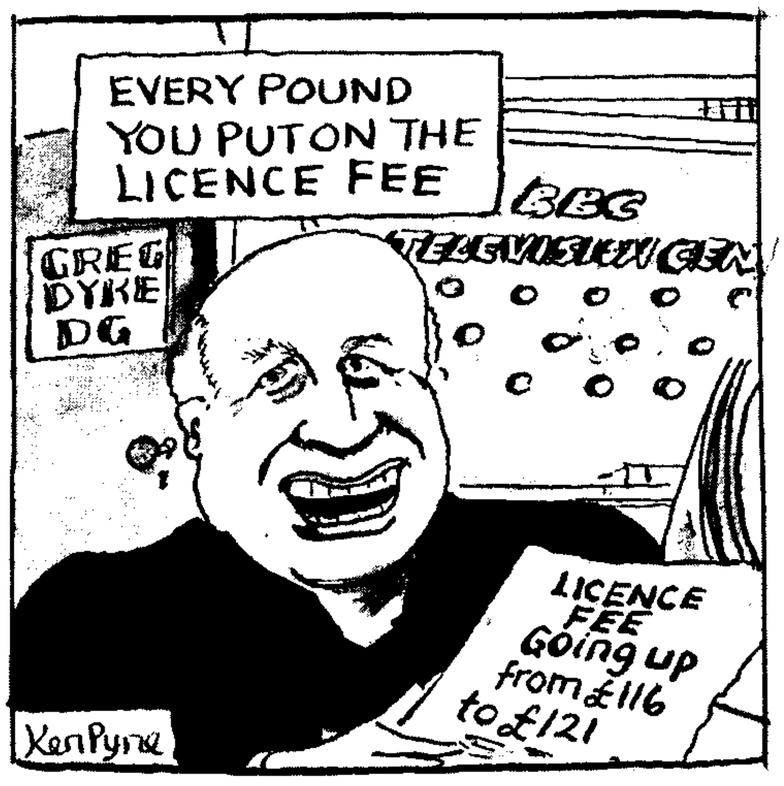
OBN

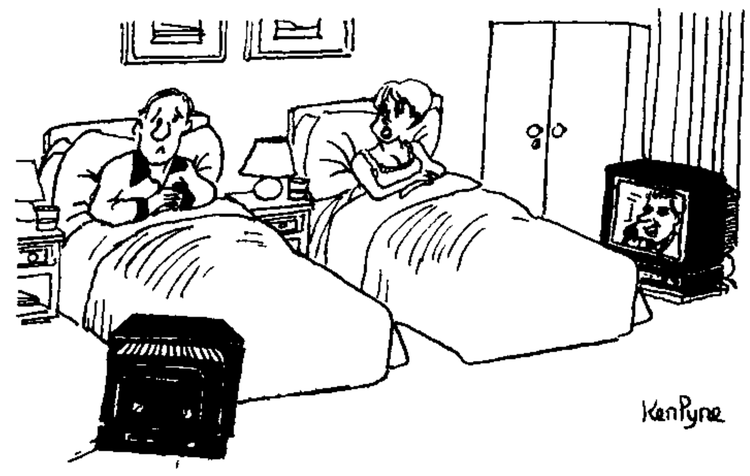
He brings a level of creativity and integrity to this whole process of television and the world is better off because Greg Dyke is where he is in television today.

JOHN HENDRICKS
Chairman, Discovery Corporation

Submitted by Mick Morton

£10 paid for entries put forward for the Order of the Brown Nose.





"Do you remember the early days of our marriage when we used to share the same television?"

AD NAUSEAM

FOR advertising agencies, *pro bono* charity work brings in no money, no freebies and no Caribbean film shoots. But adland still hankers after it like nothing else.

To understand why, see last week's headlines. With a spend of only £1m, Barnardo's garnered more awareness of its current campaign than it ever could have hoped for. Actually, strike that: it was exactly what it hoped for, and even better for its agency, Bartle Bogle Hegarty.

The Silver Spoon campaign, which features babies with cockroaches and needles in their mouths, is merely the continuation of four years of lazy controversy from BBH. Readers may recall the similar campaign in which child prostitutes were given wizened faces. It caused a similar level of complaint, escaped censure… and ended up winning BBH the IPA Effectiveness Awards last year.

M&C Saatchi's "Stop. Full Stop" work for the NSPCC was just as aggressive and received just as many garlands come the industry love-ins. It later emerged that the charity had closed a number of its child protection schemes and reduced manpower on its helplines, at the same time as financing an expensive media campaign.

As this column has said time and again, the current self-regulatory advertising system for posters and print simply incites award-hungry ad agencies to break the rules. Charity work provides a convenient carapace to deflect anyone who takes offence, allowing ad creatives to overstep the mark and then look askance at complainants for being both oversensitive ninnies and yet, paradoxically, callous skinflints. Ultimately, this kind of schlock-shock works best for the ad men: expect more babies, needles and suchlike this time next year.

A HEARTY welcome to adland for a brand new shop. With the reputations of two of its founders, the agency – yet to be named – can hardly go wrong.

The creative director is to be Mark Wnek, who is leaving EuroRSCG. He is best known in adland for a "Life in the Day" piece about him in *The Sunday Times* in 2000, in which he was quoted as saying: "Our mortgage is so big I can't bring myself to say it out loud", "I've got 300 shirts and ties at home" and "I'm like a kind of life commando".

Joining him is fellow life commando Ben Langdon. *Eye* 1086 told how Langdon had suggested his then-agency, McCann-Erickson, change its name to McCann Langdon, whereupon he was booted out for hubris. Any bets on Wnek-Langdon being the name above the door?

AS Lord Saatchi takes up co-chairmanship of the Tory party, attention turns to the way in which his other interests function: namely M&C Saatchi, the advertising agency of which he is a founding partner.

The Portman Group has hired the agency in a £1m push to curb binge drinking. At the same time M&C happily represents Becks, Fosters and Kronenbourg. Intriguingly, one of M&C's six stated founding principles is "brutal simplicity of thought". In this case the thought is indeed brutally simple: make cash fast wherever you can.

DUMB BRITAIN

The Weakest Link, BBC2

Anne Robinson: Which Roman poet wrote the Aeneid – Virgil or Brains?

Contestant: Brains.

GWR FM Bristol

Presenter: What happened in Dallas on 22 November 1963?

Contestant: I don't know, I wasn't watching it then.

Fort Boyard, Challenge TV

Jodie Marsh: Arrange these two groups of letters to form a word – CHED and PIT.

Team: Chedpit.

DUMB AMERICA

The Tonight Show With Jay Leno

Jay Leno: Name the twins who founded Ancient Rome. Their names begin with "R".

Contestant: The Wright brothers.

"We can't agree on 'Love Actually'"

MEDIA NEWS

THERE is further embarrassment for Clear Channel Communications, Tony Blair's favourite right-wing, fundamentalist Christian, Texas-based media conglomerate.

In *Eye* 1092 we reported how one of Clear's subsidiaries, SFX UK, became embroiled in the Rio Ferdinand drug test affair. Now the PR adviser chosen by the crusaders at Clear to promote their wholesome worldview (Dixie Chicks evil, Tony Blair good) is in a spot of bother himself. For SFX's "image consultant" is none other than former *Sun* editor Stuart Higgins – who was named in parliament two weeks ago as an alleged sex pest.

According to Clive Soley MP, in 1996 News International was obliged to pay £500,000 to Higgins's former executive secretary at Wapping, who was threatening to sue him for sexual harassment and bullying.

IT SEEMS that James "Lucky Jim" Murdoch's record at Star TV wasn't quite the brilliant display of executive daring and profitable efficiency directors of BSkyB were led to believe.

Thanks to some diligent digging by Asian media analysts, it's been revealed – too late, of course – that Lucky Jim had very little to do with the planning that allowed Star to make a modest operating profit of $10m this year.

According to Media Partners Asia, the strategy to turn Star around was in place before Murdoch junior arrived and for the last three years it has been guided by a team of professionals led by chief operating officer Bruce Churchill, who ran Star until May. As the *Sydney Morning Herald*'s Beijing correspondent Hamish McDonald put it, James "had his hand held".

This year's "success" also has to be seen in the context of the vast costs incurred in the Star venture. The Dirty Digger paid $1bn to the man who established Star – Hong Kong tycoon Li Ka-shing – and another $1bn went into the infrastructure which delivers the non-English programmes that have helped it survive.

Also unmentioned in the balance sheet is the cultural deficit incurred by James's willingness to dump any programmes the Chinese government didn't like. "James's kow-towing to Beijing," writes Joe Studwell of *China Quarterly*, "has been somewhere between risible and sick."

THE NEOPHILIACS

"Bulgaria is the new Benidorm." — *Independent*.

"Class is now the new sex." — Suzanne Moore, *Mail on Sunday*.

"To text is the new sex." — *Sydney Morning Herald*.

"Is separated the new engaged?" — *Mail on Sunday*.

"52 is the new 30." — Jeremy Vine, Radio 2.

"Beer and food matching is the new rock'n'roll." — *What's Brewing*.

"Cartoonishness is the new verisimilitude." — James Wood, *London Review of Books*.

BIRTSPEAK

"From the new year Justin Bairamian… will manage a team of audience insight managers that will work with production divisions to help programme makers use audience insight as part of new programme development.

"His team will also work with audience research and commissioning teams to help bring audiences to the forefront of people's minds. Charlotte Fuller, current head of consumer planning, has been appointed head of the audience insight team."

— *Item on* Arieli, *the BBC's online house journal.*

Porn Wars

CAN Richard Desmond really afford to buy the Telegraph group, particularly if multiple American bidders become involved?

Although his new friends at the *Guardian* have implied that serious money will continue to flow from his porn empire, this is far from certain. There's certainly no pot of gold in his wank-mags, which he retains largely to promote his hitherto lucrative TV channels. But even the telly profits are now threatened by his old rival David "The Slug" Sullivan.

Access to Dirty Des's porn TV requires a starter pack fee (for the BSkyB digicard) plus a monthly subscription billed to a credit or debit card. His reliance on Sky's technical services probably explains why the *Sun* doesn't receive the same deranged treatment as the *Daily Mail* in his papers, for should he offend Master James Murdoch the digicard contract could quickly be cancelled, preventing Desmond from collecting payments from his customers.

Having slashed newspaper costs and jobs well past the bone, Desmond is relying on these subscription revenues to fund the expansion of *OK!* into markets as diverse as China and the US, as well as a bid for the *Telegraph*. But those plans are threatened by David Sullivan's belated arrival to the TV world, partly to get even with the (Labour-donating) Desmond. Tory fan Sullivan is director general (*sic*) of Babecast, a new entrant on the Sky Digital programme guide, but on open access rather than a subscription basis. And unfortunately for Desmond, Sullivan offers free access to his wares from 9pm to 4am all week. Given that porn purchasers are notoriously price sensitive, and that Desmond's channels simply offer endless re-runs of old movies, this is a substantial threat to his financial health.

Naturally, Sullivan's new service is not philanthropic in nature. Babecast's selling point is interactivity, with viewers having the option to pay heavily for this strangely popular facility. From 9pm, two of Sullivan's personally vetted "models" respond live to text messages from those at home. After midnight, they begin stripping whilst soliciting more text and voice messages. Later on there's "contact" availability, on top of more fully naked women.

Desmond initially responded to this threat by hurriedly introducing two hours a night of free old porn from 8pm to promote subscription sales. In what smacks of panic, he is now giving away two extra porn channels free for every one purchased, but his prospects are poor, given the lack of live interaction.

In the end, of course, many of Sullivan's "free to watch" viewers are likely to spend through their phone bills as much, or even more, than they would otherwise have done subscribing to watch Desmond's clapped out videos. Texts to the ladies are £1.50 each (plus network charge) and live phone calls are the same amount per minute, with the "models" doing their best to keep suckers, er, viewers on line for as long as possible.

Naturally, Sullivan is simulcasting the Babecast TV programming on the web, further mitigating his dependence on BSkyB. Desmond too has belatedly made tentative steps in this direction, but lacks Sullivan's established bandwidth and ISP base. And, just in case people tire of using their computers, Sullivan has also began offering a range of services for the new generation of colour screen mobile phones: in and outbound texting to virtual girlfriends, wank lines, porn stills, streaming porn videos and contact info swapping. Much of the money spent on all these delights is of course dosh that might otherwise have gone to Dirty Des.

Still, at least if he buys the *Torygraph* he'll have another outlet in which to promote his TV filth. At the moment the only newspapers which include Des's channels in their listings are the *Express* and the *Daily Star*. What on earth will Sir Herbert Gussett make of it?

SUPERMODELS

KERBER

DOING THE ROUNDS

Real choice?

"FOR patients, choice matters, and we must make existing choices real and look to extend these." So says health secretary John "Oh fuck, not health" Reid.

Labour's vision of a consumerist NHS is for patients to book online for a GP appointment and choose their hospital treatment from a large selection of providers (state, NHS and foreign) based on "access and outcome information measures". Fine: but will they work in the real world?

An early pioneer of patient consumerism was a GP who left a trough full of antibiotics in his waiting room with a "help yourself" sticker above it. Rather than being hailed as a trailblazer, he was censured by the GMC. As one Essex GP puts it: "All this guff about patient choice leaves out the crucial word 'informed'. The reason patients consult us in the first place is because we are better informed than they are. That's why I have a prescription pad and they don't."

Alas, this defensive view doesn't work either. It costs £300,000 to train a doctor, and each dishes out more than £3m worth of treatment in a career. Yet at best only half of patients take sufficient medication for it to be effective. It's a phenomenal waste of time and money, and the government could save a fortune by launching a "if you don't want the tablets, don't bother the doctor" campaign.

Instead, it's ignoring patients with medical conditions and focusing choice on surgery. Patients will be given information such as average wait for an appointment, average wait for surgery, 30-day mortality and morbidity rates, number of stars, latest commission for health improvement (CHI) report and position in Dr Foster's Opal Fruit Beezer Homes League Table — and then they'll be asked to choose. Those who still wish to go to the hospital with the easiest parking will be allowed to, but Labour hopes enough patients will shop around to introduce a market discipline into the NHS.

The Tories tried this and it bombed because there was neither enough money nor capacity in the system. Labour is trying to force it through with more money but still very little capacity. As Dr Richard Lawson, a GP in Somerset, says: "Ten days ago, I helped a patient exercise her right of choice regarding hospitals. It took over two hours and involved about 20 phone calls... We can only extend choice if there are adequate resources, and there are more urgent things to buy first, like basic mental health services or outpatient appointments that are not postponed ten times."

The government is planning to take some of the work off GPs by employing "patient advisers" to help patients choose, but a decision has yet to be made as to who and where they'll be (nurses or lay people, in the surgery or on the end of a phone). Tony Blair has already spent a fortune pushing NHS Direct, which was meant to be a "gateway to the NHS" but has failed miserably and there is a real danger it could be replaced with a similar fiasco, with two patient advisers in a distant call-centre besieged by irate consumers.

● THE government, alas, continues to plough money into consumerism with little proof of value. Patient Advocacy and Liaison Services have no real power to stand up to the trusts who employ them. The latest vogue is to "understand the patient experience". So we now have a "Commission for Patient and Public Involvement in Health" who'll shortly be seeding the NHS with "involvement forums" to "democratise the grass roots of health".

As one doctor observed: "Before my endoscopy list last week, I was asked to see a man from the Cancer Network. He was pleasant and polite, but seemed to have no idea what he was doing. He was a 'Cancer Network Facilitator' who was 'tracking the journey' of patients with cancer. He was apparently responsible to a 'Cancer Network Facilitator Co-ordinator'. When I inquired what he was doing, he thought for a minute and then suggested he had to measure something.

"He thought that having only just started, he would need six months or so in post to enable him to 'focus' on a project which would help cancer patients. He has no previous medical experience, and is apparently employed by the primary care trust. He is paid more than the sister who runs the unit. One despairs..."

M.D.

off your trolley

REEVE & WAY

I'M REALLY, REALLY SORRY BUT I CAN'T MAKE MY APPOINTMENT...
CLINIC 3A
SOMETHING'S COME UP. I'M AFRAID I'LL HAVE TO CANCEL, I'M SO SORRY...
OH, DON'T WORRY...
WE LIVE FOR THIS
THE CANCELLATION ZONE
YES! PATIENT CANCELS, NOT OUR FAULT...

SIGNAL FAILURES

Target practice

ALISTAIR Darling, the most pathetic transport secretary since the Tories, got flustered when the transport select committee quizzed him on official rail targets.

His problem is that Labour's 10-year transport plan set a target of 50 percent more passenger miles; but Richard Bowker, head of the strategic rail authority (SRA), is planning for 25 to 35 percent more — and latest figures show annual growth of just 1 percent.

When Darling was asked about Bowker downgrading the figure, he snapped: "Oh, for goodness sake. Look, he said it in his report... What he said at the time was that it was a snapshot of where the SRA reckoned things were." Darling also started making excuses for his government's failure: "Until we make sure that we can increase reliability, then it is going to take time to get people to use the trains."

Bowker had to downgrade the figure because much of the rail budget is lost in breathtaking inefficiency or goes to sectors least likely to deliver big growth. Virgin's dreams for the west-coast mainline are bankrolled with billions of public pounds (*Eyes passim*). But passenger miles on Virgin West Coast fell 13 percent from 1998-99 to 2002-03. More billions are being sunk in the new Chunnel link for the ailing Eurostar operation (*Eye* 1088).

Hardly any cash is left for areas where, for modest outlay, big growth potential actually exists: around provincial cities, for example, where roads are already congested. West Yorkshire's passenger numbers increased 44 percent from 1994 to 2002 and its overall peak-time overcrowding is now worse than the south-east's. While demand will increase with rising employment in Leeds, some routes are stuck with paltry little trains already overwhelmed by today's passengers. On no single day since privatisation has the full commuter capacity been provided.

West Midlands has had 25 percent passenger growth in six years; but improvements are thwarted by Virgin's shorter, more frequent trains. Cardiff's commuter lines have seen big growth but Bowker has forced through a miserly new franchise promising no new trains for the next 15 years.

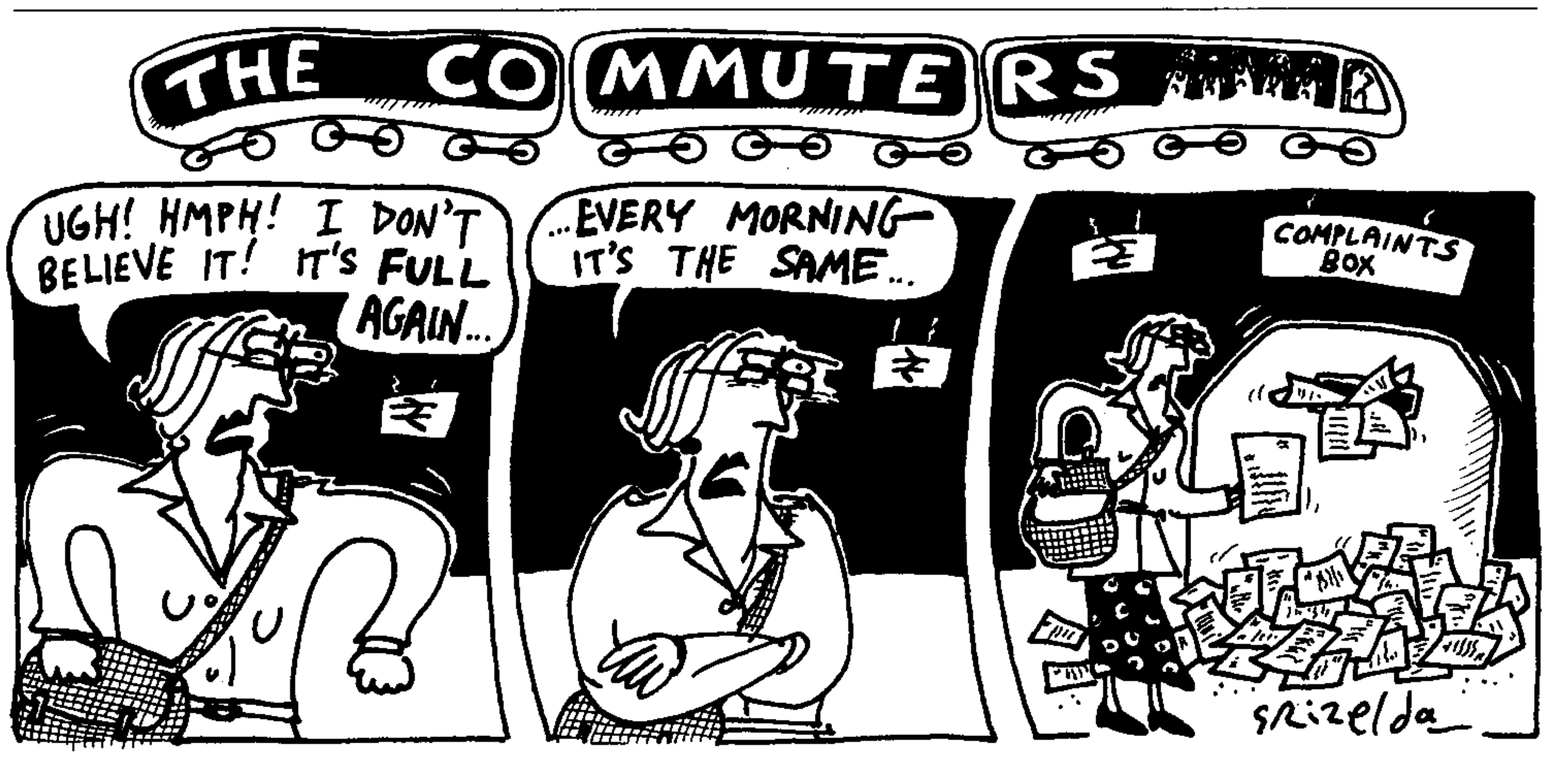
The planned Oxford-Cambridge link (*Eye* 1046) was rejected by the SRA despite its potential to attract new travellers and free up train seats in greater London. And so it goes on.

The SRA has frozen its fund for small rail developments and wants to divert £600m from maintenance of supposedly minor routes to the mainlines into London. Lesser routes get less maintenance than Bowker's mainlines already; fewer repairs would jeopardise the reliability improvement Darling says is necessary for growth.

In fact many of these "branch lines" are arteries for passengers and freight, into and between cities. Regional franchises show 5.3 percent growth in passenger miles in the latest year-on-year figures — while Bowker's favoured sectors were static.

PS: Glasgow and Edinburgh *have* latched on to the potential for growth in local rail. Extra trains are on order while new stations are opened and old stations extended. Bowker can't put the kibosh on such extravagance because the Scottish executive calls the shots north of the border. How convenient for Darling that while he stalls rail improvements in England, it's a different story for his constituents in Edinburgh.

'Dr B. Ching'



ROTTEN BOROUGHS

THAT WOMAN AGAIN

WITH an unerring instinct for doing the right thing, Margaret "Enver" Hodge has snubbed constituents who have objected to a decision by Labour-run Barking and Dagenham council to approve a planning application for 62 homes on land designated as playing fields for the borough's only special needs school.

Bentry School opened in 1934 and for 62 years enjoyed direct access to a playing field with cricket and football pitches and running tracks. In 1996, however, B&D council closed all three special needs schools in the borough and replaced them with a new school, Trinity, built in the grounds of the former Bentry School. During construction the playing fields were "temporarily" fenced off. Seven years on, the fence remains and the playing fields have become overgrown.

In March this year a former deputy head teacher of a local primary school, Alison Finney, wrote to her MP, now the minister for children, asking Margaret Hodge to support a campaign to restore the playing fields and make them accessible again – in line with government policy for reducing child obesity. Hodge never replied. Meanwhile earlier this month the council approved a planning application by Bellway Homes to build 62 houses on the site.

Hodge must have forgotten that in 1998 she supported an amendment to the school standard and framework act, which stipulated that playing fields must be disused for 10 years, not five as previously, before councils can flog them. Claims by councillors that they have fulfilled their obligations under the act by offering an alternative site, in the middle of an industrial estate five miles away from Trinity school, are likely to be tested at appeal.

● DID YOU KNOW? Scousers taking "sickies" at Sefton council, Merseyside, cost £4.83m last year – £44.31 per day for every employee.

BACKLOG TROUBLE

A HOUSING officer at Hackney council advised a landlord that the best way to get his tenant's long overdue housing benefit claim to the head of the queue was to obtain a court order to have her evicted.

Sean Donnellan, who lets a flat in Stoke Newington, north London, to pregnant single mother Tracy Van-Daal, contacted the *Eye* after he had received no rent for three months because of the Labour council's breathtaking incompetence. Ms Van-Daal has been pursuing her housing benefit (HB) claim, supposed to take two weeks to process, since last May and has been unable to pay rent since August. Fortunately she had a sympathetic landlord. But Mr Donnellan, an unemployed IT consultant, himself depended on his small rental income to get by.

Ms Van-Daal's claim was first delayed by an incompetent Inland Revenue, which failed to supply paperwork about her working family tax credit. It was not acknowledged by Hackney as fully submitted until 13 August 2003. After two weeks Ms Van-Daal visited the housing benefit office. She was told there was "a backlog" and she should return in "five-to-seven working days". For the next few weeks she did just that.

On 24 September she was seen by customer service officer Symone Robinson, who issued a letter for her landlord saying that Ms Van-Daal's claim was "currently awaiting assessment". The letter also asked that the landlord "allow one month before querying this case", as "our [computer] systems have been down for two-and-a-half months now and we are actively trying to get back up to scratch".

On 27 October she returned to the office and was told her claim would be treated as "urgent" – and that would take one week. On 3 November, Ms Van-Daal returned to the office, was told there was "a backlog", and that she should return in "five-to-seven working days". On 10 November she returned and was told again there was "a backlog". This time she was told to return in "seven-to-10 working days".

On 12 November the landlord, Mr Donnellan, rang the Hackney revenues and benefits agency and spoke to Dreduela Abiodun, who confirmed the claim was still "awaiting assessment". Ms Abiodun put the claim on "48 hours resolve" – which sounded impressive until she admitted there were actually "thousands" of claims in that category. She then admitted that unless a claim was submitted with a court order to evict the tenant, there was little hope of a speedy resolution.

Mr Donnellan told the *Eye*: "Call me old-fashioned, but I'd prefer not to evict a three-year-old and his pregnant mother six weeks before Christmas simply to satisfy Hackney's paperwork queue-jumping procedures."

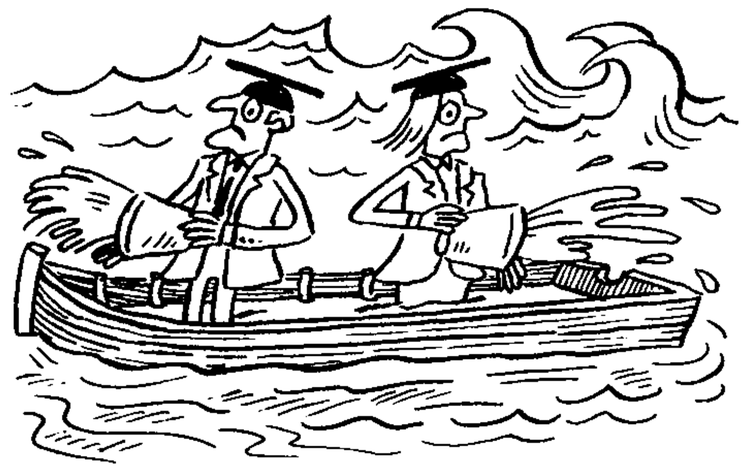
As the *Eye* went to press, Mr Donnellan was waiting for a cheque for half the amount of Ms Van Daal's claim, some £1,200, which Hackney promised was, er, "in the post".

Hackney council press office, while admitting Ms Van-Daal's experience was "unacceptable", was eager to point out that things had greatly improved since it sacked useless computer firm ITnet, to whom it had "outsourced" the HB service, last year. At the height of the ITnet fiasco in 2001, an estimated 70,000 claims were unattended and claims which should have been processed in 14 days took, on average, 216 days – nearly eight months. Processing now takes an average of 110 days – a mere three-and-a-half months! Except the extra "backlog" is currently six weeks. Added to the three-and-a-half month average, this makes five months in all. Tracy Van-Daal should count herself lucky.

IT'S GRIM UP NORTH LONDON

KNIFE & PACKER

I THINK THE WHOLE CONCEPT OF HAPPY HOUR IS A DISGRACE!
YOUNG PEOPLE WITH NO IDEA OF HOW TO DRINK BEING ENCOURAGED TO BINGE
HAPPY HOUR 6-7
ABSOLUTELY, JEZ. I'VE BEEN ON TO RODOLPHE TO STOP IT. DOES HE HAVE ANY IDEA HOW FOUR QUADRUPLE CINNAMON LATTES CAN RUIN A LIFE?
TWO PITCHERS OF GUATEMALAN ESPRESSO, MAN



EDUCASHUN NEWZ

Jarvis Special

PARIS Moayedi's offer to resign as executive chairman of the troubled Jarvis group will have been little consolation to graduate students at Lancaster university who arrived at their new accommodation and found themselves wandering around in the dark on wet floors and tripping over building materials.

The 402-room Graduate College has been built by the Jarvis University Partnerships Programme under which the firm will provide another 1,956 rooms which it will then manage for the next 38 years. Prospects don't look good. The external locks on the building didn't work, meaning security guards had to be posted at the doors; water from showers had a tendency to flood into bedrooms; and many light switches were miswired so did not switch on at all. Kitchen fans didn't work; windows lacked handles and couldn't be opened; and one piece of guttering fell off the building altogether.

In addition, many rooms were still full of builders' filth and flammable paint and glue were left in stairwells. Smoke detectors were still covered with blue plastic and promised laundry facilities were not available. College porters faced with a huge queue of students with complaints.

In a desperate bid to sort things out, students and academic authorities have united to push Jarvis into action. But students are still having to pay more than £70 a week rent.

Graduate College principal Maurice Kirby said conditions in the building were "awful" and praised the tolerance of the students. He said if the rest of the Jarvis contract continues in the same style: "There will be the devil to pay."

FOLLOWING roof problems and electronic white boards which jammed, the Jews Free School in Kenton, north London, sent pupils home for the day earlier this month because light fittings in the dining hall were about to fall from the ceiling – another triumph for Jarvis.

The 14-month old school buildings were put up by Jarvis under a private finance initiative (PFI) which saw the school move from Camden to Brent. Since the PFI, headmistress Ruth Robins has been made a dame and chair of governors Arnold Wagner an OBE for services to education.

The school closed for the day on 7 November while Jarvis fixed the lighting. Funnily enough the school is booked on 26 November to host a conference entitled *PPP Education: Delivering Schools for the future*. Truly a better venue could not have been found.

ANOTHER instance of Jarvis's shoddy treatment of contractors emerges in Richmond, Surrey, where Leigh Visual, a small electronic security company, installed swipe cards, an alarm system and CCTV cameras in five schools as part of Jarvis's big PFI contract in the borough.

The agreed price for Leigh Visual's work was £151,000 and the contract was completed in August. The schools managers were delighted with the work, and there has been no complaint. Yet as the *Eye* went to press, Leigh Visual had received the princely sum of £34,000 and its directors were still whistling for the £117,000 owed to them.

When they complained to their larger contractor, which is directly contracted to Jarvis, they were alarmed to find that it too had only received part payment and is still owed about £1m. Leigh Visual meanwhile is fighting hard to stay afloat.

NOOKS and CORNERS

SOUTH Kensington Underground station – the principal gateway to the V&A and other great cultural attractions around Exhibition Road – is a modest thing.

The Circle and District Line platforms were once covered by an arched iron and glass roof but are now open to the sky. At street level, a charming arcade of shops runs from Pelham Street to Thurloe Street within a curve of single storey buildings which are enlivened by the ceramic frontages with Art Nouveau lettering added when the Great Northern, Piccadilly & Brompton Railway arrived soon after 1900.

All this of course is a monstrous under-utilisation of an extremely valuable bit of real estate in a wealthy residential area. But not for much longer.

In 1999, anxious to exploit "air rights", London Underground devised a scheme to finance £25m worth of improvements to the station by working with commercial developers to build over the tracks and redevelop the site. Although granted planning permission by the royal borough of Kensington & Chelsea (RBKC), it was uneconomic. So Stanhope plc and the Hong Kong-based company Hutchison Whampoa Property have now come up with a much bigger £110m scheme by Terry Farrell.

At the rounded, sharp end of the site will rise an 11-storey glass tower of offices, while the rest of the station site will be covered by a seven-storey block of high-density flats. This will require the demolition of the terrace along Thurloe Street containing, among other things, the celebrated Polish restaurant Daquise.

RBKC loves this scheme even though – as the South Kensington Underground Development (SKUD) Action Group points out – it violates the council's own unitary development plan. Many locals consider the proposal much too large when compared to the mid-Victorian stuccoed squares and terraces nearby.

They also wonder if the station really needs all the improvements which are supposed to be the *raison d'être* of the scheme: after all, it works reasonably well already and is pleasant to use. Furthermore, South Ken is a residential and cultural district in which a large commercial development is inappropriate.

The current plans are opposed by the Victorian Society and English Heritage as well as several local amenity societies. What is rum, however, is that the principal local society, the Brompton Association, is all in favour.

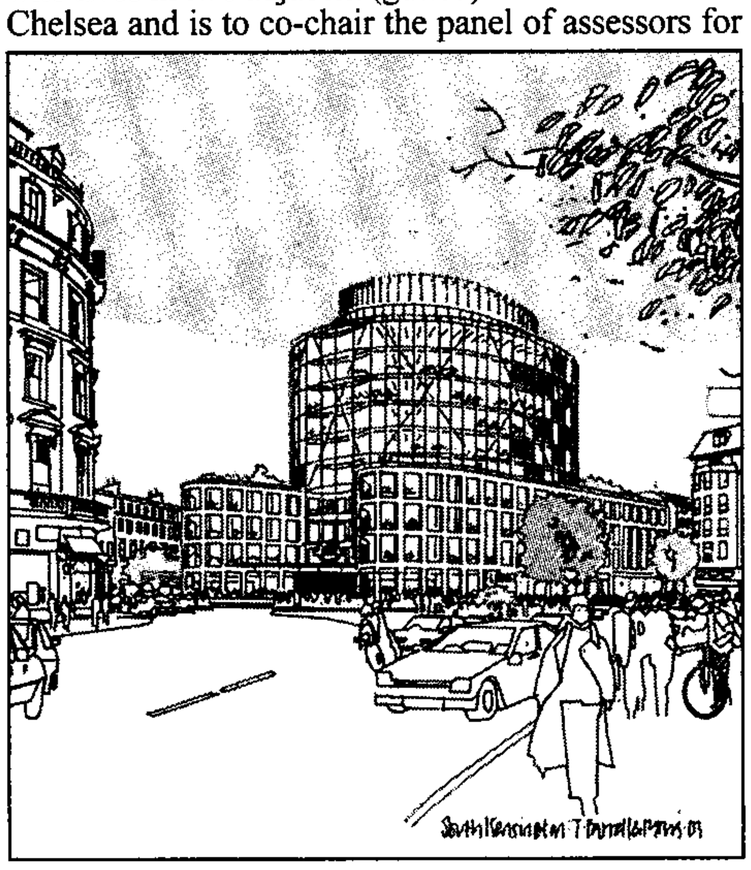
Obviously this has nothing to do with the fact that its hon. secretary, the architect Susan Walker, aka Lady Anstruther, is a member of the family which owns much of Thurloe Square and land to the north of the station. Nor can it have anything to do with the fact that the hon. treasurer, Tim Kemp, owns the Pelham Hotel and other property near South Ken station. Many ordinary members of the society are, however, furious with the committee for accepting the huge scheme and want an emergency general meeting.

But there's another curious aspect. While supporting the South Ken redevelopment, RBKC is also promoting the "Exhibition Road Project" with the City of Westminster and the mayor of London. Launched this year, it is seeking someone to wave a magic designer-wand over Albertopolis. "The Project," announces the brochure, "requires a forward-looking design, focused on Exhibition Road, which will be the most visible manifestation of South Kensington's renaissance."

It's difficult to grasp what the promoters have in mind (other than encouraging the "attendant commercial opportunities"). For the only practical proposal in the brief is to improve the pedestrian tunnel from the station to some of the museums.

One thing is clear, however; and that is that it's a terribly small world.

The Exhibition Road Project brochure quotes Sir Stuart Lipton, chairman of CABE – the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment – making a "passionate plea" for better quality public spaces. Sir Stuart, who somehow manages to combine his public-spirited role at CABE with being chairman of Stanhope plc, which happens to be co-developer for South Ken station, has often worked with our old friend My Lord Rogers of Riverside, who lives in two adjacent (gutted) terraced houses in Chelsea and is to co-chair the panel of assessors for



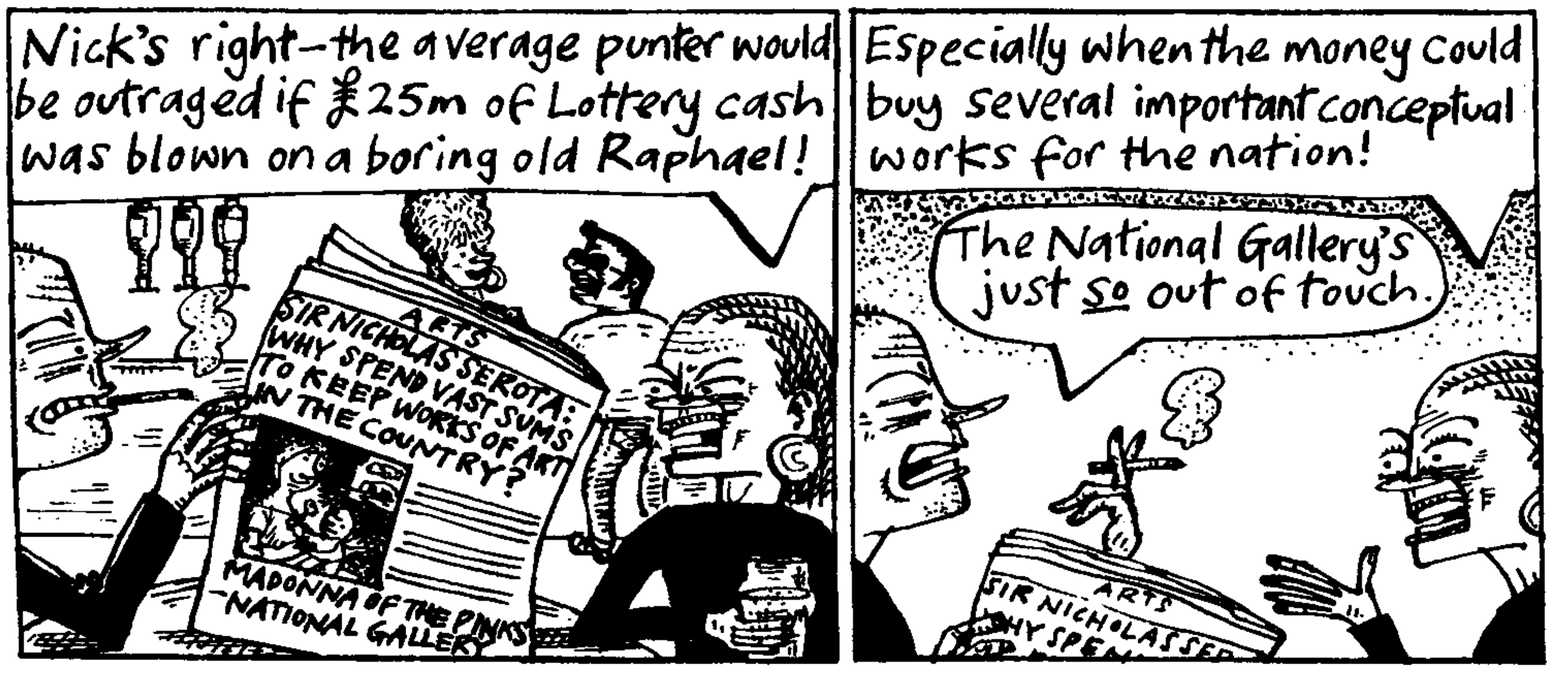
the Exhibition Road Project (the other is Cllr Cockell, leader of RBKC).

Rogers's brother, Peter, meanwhile, is technical director of Stanhope. Sir Stuart also advises Imperial College which, as a neighbour, supports the Exhibition Road Project, among whose panel members are Julia Peyton-Jones, the director of the Serpentine Gallery, where Sir Stuart is holding this year's CABE Christmas party, and the architect David Adjaye, who designed the interior of CABE's offices. It certainly is a grand vision all these luminaries have for poor old South Ken and its (so far) unexploited neighbourhood.

'Piloti'

YOUNG BRITISH ARTISTS

BY BIRCH


Nick's right–the average punter would be outraged if £25m of Lottery cash was blown on a boring old Raphael!
ARTS
SIR NICHOLAS SEROTA: WHY SPEND VAST SUMS TO KEEP WORKS OF ART IN THE COUNTRY?
MADONNA OF THE PINKS – NATIONAL GALLERY
Especially when the money could buy several important conceptual works for the nation!
The National Gallery's just so out of touch.
ARTS
SIR NICHOLAS SER

I-SPY

Canvey Island

Blackheath

Submitted by Rob Bain & Frank Woodgate. £10 paid for similar submissions. *(SAE required for return of photographs.)*

MUSIC & MUSICIANS

THIS Christmas, when the TV cameras penetrate the candle-softened gloom of King's Cambridge for the annual lessons and carols, watch for signs of strain on the face of music director, Stephen Cleobury.

Known for decades as a quiet, modest if not downright mousey character, poor Mr Cleobury walked into a dreadful scandal not so long ago when – to the amazement of everyone – he abandoned his wife and set up home with the chaplain of King's, the Rev Emma Hebblethwaite. Ms Hebblethwaite resigned; the couple had a baby; and it's kept high table gossip going ever since.

But there is more. For the past 20 years he has also been the conductor of the venerable Cambridge University Music Society, a job which by common consent he has done creditably. Spurred by the Hebblethwaite debacle, a group of academics in the university, supported by the Professor of Music Roger Parker, have been plotting to get rid of him; and, assuming success, they quietly offered his job to the new director of music at St John's College, David Hill.

Smelling a rat, Hill turned it down. But by then news of the intrigue had begun to spread and, earlier this month, turned into one almighty slanging match of the kind only an ancient seat of learning could foster.

The society's AGM at the music faculty building turned into a sort of trial at which Cleobury's enemies accused him to his face of everything from incompetence to unattractiveness (a poor advertisement, apparently, for CUMS membership) while his friends fought to pass a motion of no confidence in the plotters. Browbeaten into submission, Cleobury offered to resign at the conclusion of the meeting.

But the meeting never made it to conclusion. It degenerated into bedlam, during which the Professor of Music crept away and turned off the lights. Plunged into darkened chaos, the AGM then fell apart, leaving this community of gentle scholars to argue at arm's length from their respective colleges about the legality of the proceedings, the effectiveness of the motions that may or may not have been passed and (above all) whether Cleobury has or has not resigned.

It could hardly be messier. And it will be a sore test of Cleobury's professionalism as he prepares his choir for this year's tidings of comfort and joy.

'Lunchtime O'Boulez'

DOWN ON THE FARM

PHYLLIDA BARSTOWE is not only an admired novelist and married to the journalist Duff Hart-Davis, but a professional breeder of Wiltshire Horn sheep on their Gloucestershire farm. Until recently her flock roamed happily over the meadows round a fine young pure-bred ram. Then, on 1 September, she was visited by the department for the elimination of farming and rural affairs (Defra), to test her sheep under the EU-sponsored "National Scrapie Plan".

To understand what happened next some background is relevant. Defra, it may be remembered, has spent millions of pounds trying to establish a link between scrapie, a brain disease affecting a tiny minority of sheep, and BSE, a brain disease affecting a tiny minority of cattle. No link has been found (although readers may recall the famous episode when they tested thousands of sheep brains for two years, only to discover they had been looking at the brains of cows).

The reason for such excitement, of course, is that Defra still believes there may be a link between BSE and vCJD, a brain disease affecting a tiny minority of humans. So, if they can prove a link between scrapie and BSE, this would be a tremendous breakthrough, because it would show there may be a link between eating sheep and CJD. They also believe that a tiny minority of sheep are genetically susceptible to scrapie. They have therefore taken this as justification, on EU orders, to test pedigree sheep. Any which do not have the "scrapie-resistant genes", they can then order to be slaughtered or castrated.

Every step of Defra's tortuous logic is in fact based on a hypothesis for which there is no proof. There is no definite proven link between eating cattle infected with BSE and CJD. There is no evidence that any sheep has ever naturally become infected with BSE. There is no evidence that scrapie has ever infected humans. Even the theory about scrapie-resistant genes has been rubbished by one of the top independent scientists in the field, Dr Alan Dickenson. The whole of the EU's scrapie eradication programme thus rests on a card-house of unproven hypotheses.

When Defra tested the brains of 54,000 sheep from abattoirs, they did find 56 infected with scrapie. But no fewer than eight of these also possessed their so-called "scrapie resistant genotype". Since this made total nonsense of their theory, they then carried out another test, which luckily came out with the result they were after: ie that only 28 of the sheep were infected with scrapie, none of which had the resistant gene. "At present it is not known if the cause of these findings," said Defra, "is a flaw in the methodology." But, flawed methodology or not, the great thing was they still had the excuse they needed to kill any animal they could find without that "resistant gene".

All of which brings us back to Mrs Hart-Davis's Wiltshire Horn ram. Of course it turned out to be the one animal in her flock without the resistant gene. So, although it was a perfectly healthy young sheep, off to the slaughterhouse under EU rules it had to go – on the basis of four different hypotheses piled on top of each other, for not one of which there is any proof a genuine scientist could accept. Mrs Hart-Davis was none too pleased.

'Muckspreader'

Letters

Private Eye

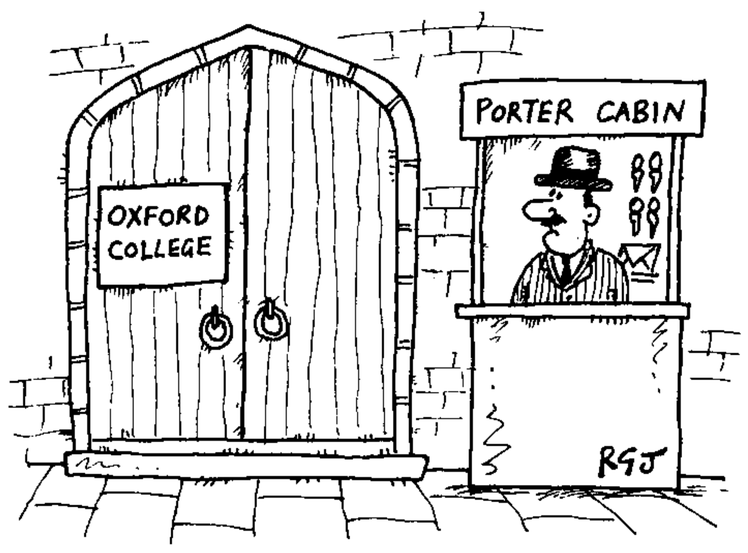
Portakabin news

Sir,

I wonder whether David Plowright, ex-chairman of Granada, is now looking for work experience at your esteemed organ? Upon hearing plans by Granada to vacate its Manchester headquarters (quoted on today's www.broadcastnow.co.uk) he quips, "I hope a fine production centre doesn't turn into a Portakabin".

Faithfully yours,
ADELINE RAMAGE,

Via email.



Bashing the bishop

Sir,

I wouldn't feel the need to respond to your cartoons, but with 1093 the most gay issue ever (pp 1, 3, 4, 5, 14, 17, 19, 21, 22) a few facts may not go amiss; there is more than a hint of ignorance in "Knacker swoops on Bishop".

What the Bishop of Chester actually said was that people who are "primarily homosexual" can "reorientate themselves" with the help of psychiatrists. "I would encourage them to consider that as an option, but I would not set myself up as a medical specialist on the subject." He indeed is not, and no psychiatrist in Britain would use this unless they had been stuck in a church for the last 30 years. The chief constable of Cheshire police publicly criticised his outburst as being "totally unacceptable".

Aversion therapy is not lying on a couch – as seen in A Clockwork Orange, it employs methods of torture such as electric shocks, drugs and solitary confinement, in conjunction with sexual stimuli. Whilst the bishop may be so ignorant of such methods, their utter ineffectiveness, and the offence it causes gay people that they should seek a "cure" (for their "disease"?), I hope you will allow your readers to be enlightened.

Yours faithfully,
C. TURNBULL,

London SE1.

Number crunchings

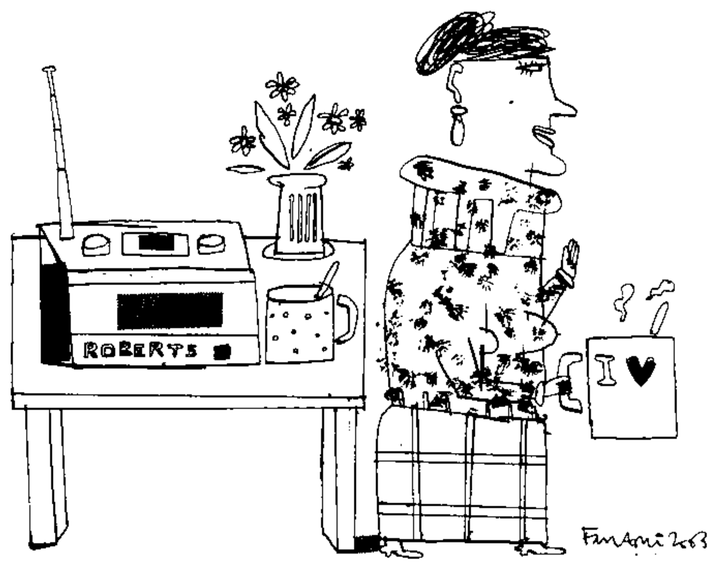
£30,000

■ Cost of flying minister Richard Caborn back from Australia for foundation hospitals vote

£30,000

■ Annual salary for two enrolled nurses

Scenes You Seldom See



"Oh, darling, finish whatever you're doing... the World Music programme's just starting on Radio Three"

Hopping mad

Sir,

In Eye 1093 I was expecting to read a letter challenging the hilarity of the "toads in road" photograph in Eye 1092. As I haven't seen such a letter, I am writing one myself.

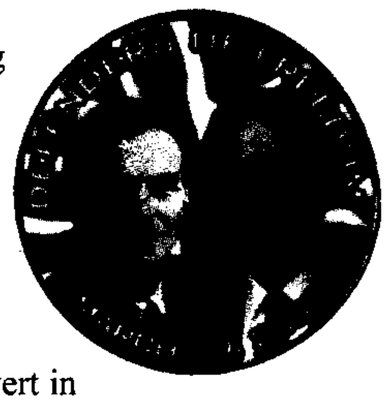
*So, what **exactly** do you find so funny about this notice? Is it the concept that toads might be in the road, or simply that "toad" rhymes with "road"?*

I must conclude that you are all ignorant townies who don't realise that toads (and frogs) are in great danger of being splatted on the road while trying to reach their spawning areas in early spring. Therefore, if you ever see a "toads in road" sign while you are driving during March, please slow down and watch out for endangered amphibians.

Yours faithfully,
KAY POWELL (Ms),

Gloucester.

Warballs



"The first 'Defenders of Freedom' coin honouring PM Blair and President Bush. A deeply poignant keepsake… Depicted in Glorious Colour… Be one of the first to mark this moment in history and own this strictly limited edition true collectors' item." — Advert in Healthhouse UK magazine

"After the tragedy of the 11 September attacks and the Afghanistan war, Jerszy Seymour decided to design a seat which 'would give the world a great big hug and bring everybody together'. The result was Muffdaddy. Made from machine washable denim covers with removable polyurethane cushions, Muffdaddy is easy to clean and maintain." — Display at the Design Museum, London.

Loyal Americans are buying "Freedom Cards", a pack of patriotic playing cards (though actually made in China) which honour the heroes of the war on terror. And which card features the first black woman to be national security adviser, Condoleezza Rice? The, er, Queen of Spades.

Blue remembered hills...

Sir,

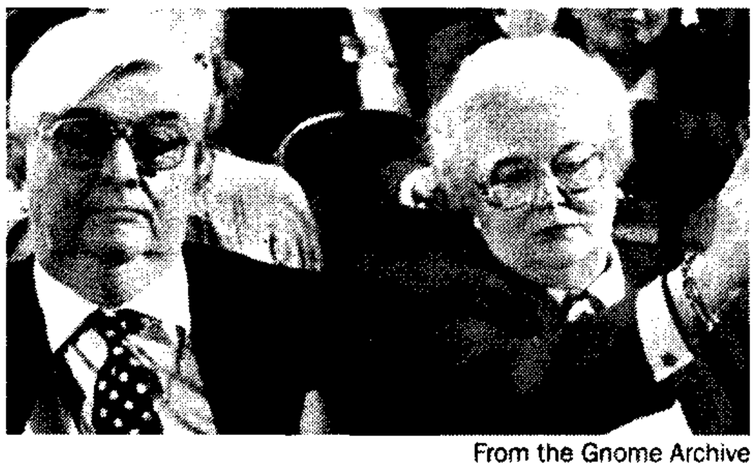
It is reported that the "coronation" of Michael Howard might see a return to the Thatcherite Toryism of years gone by.

It being so long since such true blue Conservatives were in the public eye, youngsters like me have trouble picturing what sort of people they were.

I wonder whether you might hold any pictures in your archives to help me see how the Tory faithful looked in the olden days?

Yours faithfully,
JACK PERRY,

Ledbury, Herefordshire.



From the Gnome Archive

"I've been cut off!"

Labouring a point

Sir,

In Dumb Britain you mock a contestant who could not answer the question "In ancient mythology how many labours did Hercules do?"

Not only do I also not know the answer, but I can think of no likely way by which I would know the answer, no useful purpose to which I could put this answer, and I do not give two hoots that I do not know the answer.

ROBERT LEACH,

Epsom, Surrey.

Genghis v. Attila

Sir,

Shurely the "notorious Mongol conqueror" A.C. Grayling was referring to (Hackwatch, Eye 1092) was Genghis Khan. Attila the Hun was, er, a Hun.

Yours etc,
HENRY WILTON,

Islington.

Colemanballs

£10 paid for contributions

"Whatever happens, Scotland's squad will be concentrating on getting their second leg over successfully tonight."
BBC Radio 4
(John Matthews)

"Where were you first born?"
JOOLS HOLLAND
('Space Waster'))

"The under-20s... looking to maintain the magnificent Irish record in under-age football."
Commentator, Sky Sports 1
(J.F. Beresford)

"They was given as good as they got."
JOHN TERRY, ITV2
(David Withey)

"Neil Baker is standing on the touchline with hands in tracksuit bottoms scratching his head."
GRAHAM McGARRY, BBC Radio Stoke
(Patrick Grange)

HOM SAP

AUSTIN

Letter from **Nigeria**

from our Own Correspondent

WE are a young democracy and Africa's biggest, greatest power – facts we're keen to share and celebrate. So last year Stella Obasanjo, our first lady, helped bring us that most modern, sophisticated platform to showcase our achievements: the Miss World beauty pageant.

It would, she said, show Nigeria as it truly is. Sadly it did. Our Muslim brothers spoiled the whole thing, with protests descending into riots and violence that left hundreds dead.

So we tried again, hosting the All-Africa games last month. This glittering festival had an even more glittering price tag. Construction of the stadium alone, depending on who you believe, came in at between £100m-£200m. What we euphemistically call "logistics" cost another £150m. Alas, such a trifling sum was insufficient to allow for the smooth running of the event, and we ran out of gold medals before the end.

While some may have done well out of the games, they failed to capture the public mood. Hardly anyone turned up to the closing ceremony, and those who did heckled our elected president and former military ruler, Olusegun Obasanjo. Then the heavens spoke, sending a torrential downpour that ripped the roof from the facility and soaked all our Very Important People.

The Commonwealth summit, due in town next month, is our next opportunity to show the world how we have turned our backs on the corrupt, violence-scarred rule of the generals who've been in power for so much of the time since independence in 1960. Never mind that most of us live on less than £1 a day, or that we are one of the few places in the world still dealing with polio. Our vast oil wealth is much better deployed on making sure your Queen has somewhere nice to stay: Aguda House, built only a few years ago, is having a £5m facelift, with another £2m being spent on fixtures and fittings.

We also aim to end the national disgrace of the presidency lacking its own £9m banqueting hall. Conference facilities are also being spruced up with a similar sum. Then there's the golf course, named after one of our richest former military rulers, which will receive a £14m makeover. And a hotel for all the dignitaries is having £17m thrown at it, which apparently includes importing foam from Italy.

Only the cynical could suggest that some of this money might be diverted from its official purpose in the frenzy of last minute activity. Just last month, our senate thoroughly investigated claims that two of its most prominent members had been soliciting huge bribes from ministers in return for approving their appointments, concluding that there was no case to answer.

As for the hacks attending the Commonwealth summit, we can stick them all in the athletes' village for the All-Africa games, handily placed just 30 miles from Abuja city centre. Which is just as well, as the Commonwealth seems set to make further silly compromises that may strip away any lingering rationale for its existence. For thanks to the constant gripes from Britain and other white Commonwealth members, Zimbabwe is again at the top of the agenda.

We remain mystified as to how such an august body as the Commonwealth can vilify Mugabe for corruption, human rights abuses and dodgy elections – and yet choose us to host its summit. While our elections in April were marked, as the EU and others noted, by rampant fraud, atrocities by the military against civilians in places like Odi and Taraba go unpunished, and precisely no one has been brought before the new anti-corruption tribunal.

History being a curious thing, the last time the Commonwealth was here, Zimbabwe, or Rhodesia as it then was, also topped the agenda, with the organisation also deeply split on what to do. Two weeks later, our military boys came in and toppled our first elected government – citing electoral fraud, violence and naked corruption.

FUNNY OLD WORLD

COMPILED BY **VICTOR LEWIS-SMITH**

● "There's absolutely no sense of humour at American check-ins nowadays, and for a while I was quite scared," Dave Rogerson told reporters after landing at Philadelphia airport. "I tried to explain that it was just a toy, but they told me that it had produced the highest reading for explosives they'd ever encountered, and took it very very seriously. They were very jumpy, and were utterly convinced that there must be something explosive in the dog."

Rogerson, a page designer from Leeds, was explaining what had happened to him at Norfolk Airport in Virginia, prior to boarding his flight. "When the security staff began examining my luggage, they came across my novelty toy dog. It's an hilarious life-size mechanical terrier that farts when it bends over, then belches while its eyes revolve and light up, and for some reason the gas inside registered as high-explosive TNT on their equipment. I couldn't believe it when the FBI arrived wearing rubber gloves and began taking swabs from the animal's rear end, and I was really scared when they took me away for questioning. What made things worse was that I'd placed my passport and boarding card under the dog before it went on the scanner, and that had been placed in an isolation zone under suspicion of being a bomb, so I couldn't even give the agents my papers when they demanded them. I got a real grilling from the FBI over several hours, but eventually they decided that the dog was harmless, and let me go. They even let me have the dog back. Although it doesn't fart anymore." *(The Register, 27/10/03. Spotter Stephen MacDonald)*

– ● –

● *"It's rather awkward, I admit," John Schiffeler told reporters as he showed them around the building he is selling in Oakland, California, "and frankly I'm only doing this out of sheer economic necessity. It's a magnificent old dwelling in an exclusive area, on top of a quiet and verdant hill with panoramic views of San Francisco bay, so it passes the first rule of real estate, which is location location location. The only trouble is that you have to be dead to move in, and the current occupants, also dead, will first have to move out."*

Schiffeler was responding to criticism he has received locally for his decision to sell an ancestral mausoleum in Oakland cemetery, even though it currently houses six generations of his family. "I am not without filial piety, but I find myself in a rather severe financial situation, and I'm trying to be pragmatic. The mausoleum is not doing me or anyone else any good, yet it's located in the best part of the cemetery, and is prominently featured in historical tours, so it must be worth a fortune. Before selling it, I'd move out all the bodies and rehouse them in cheaper plots, then sandblast our family name off the walls, so that a wealthier family can take over, and prepare the building for their own bodies.

"I know some people think I'm being mercenary, but I'm the last in the Schiffeler line, so there's no one else in the family left to object to the sale. Anyway, life is uncertain and impermanent, and my ancestors certainly aren't enjoying the splendid views, whereas I could get a great deal of enjoyment out of a couple of million dollars." (San Francisco Chronicle, 11/10/03. Spotter Nick McGeachin)

– ● –

● "There's no doubt that the judge was masturbating," reported the local press in Angouleme, "because a lawyer, a journalist, and a woman in the public gallery all saw what was

going on. At first, the judge merely seemed distracted while the attorney was putting his case, but observers initially put that down to the length of the speech. But before long, they clearly saw him raising his judicial gown, before opening his trousers and performing certain unmistakable movements, which lasted for a good quarter of an hour. We are all used to judges falling asleep during cases, but this behaviour is despicable and unacceptable, and the justice ministry must take action."

Speaking about the case, Justice Minister Dominique Perben confirmed that an enquiry was underway into the conduct of the unnamed judge, who has been temporarily suspended from duty. *(Charente Libre, 16/10/03. Spotter: Mal Function)*

THAT FOREIGN OFFICE ADVICE IN FULL

1. British nationals are advised not to travel to Turkey where they are in danger of being blown up.
2. Our advice is to stay in the United Kingdom which is now the number one target for terrorists.
3. Er...
4. That's it.

THOSE WORLD CUP RUGBY PIECES – A Private Eye Digest

by **Phil Space**

JONNY Wilkinson... blood, sweat and tears... fairytale ending... pride and glory... Jonny Wilkinson... sporting heroes... game for gentlemen... not like oiks in football... Jonny Wilkinson... not since 1966... national celebration... grown men crying... pubs full at breakfast... streets empty... Jonny Wilkinson... celebrations long into the night... return of masculinity... women as keen as men... Jonny Wilkinson... er... will this do? P.S.

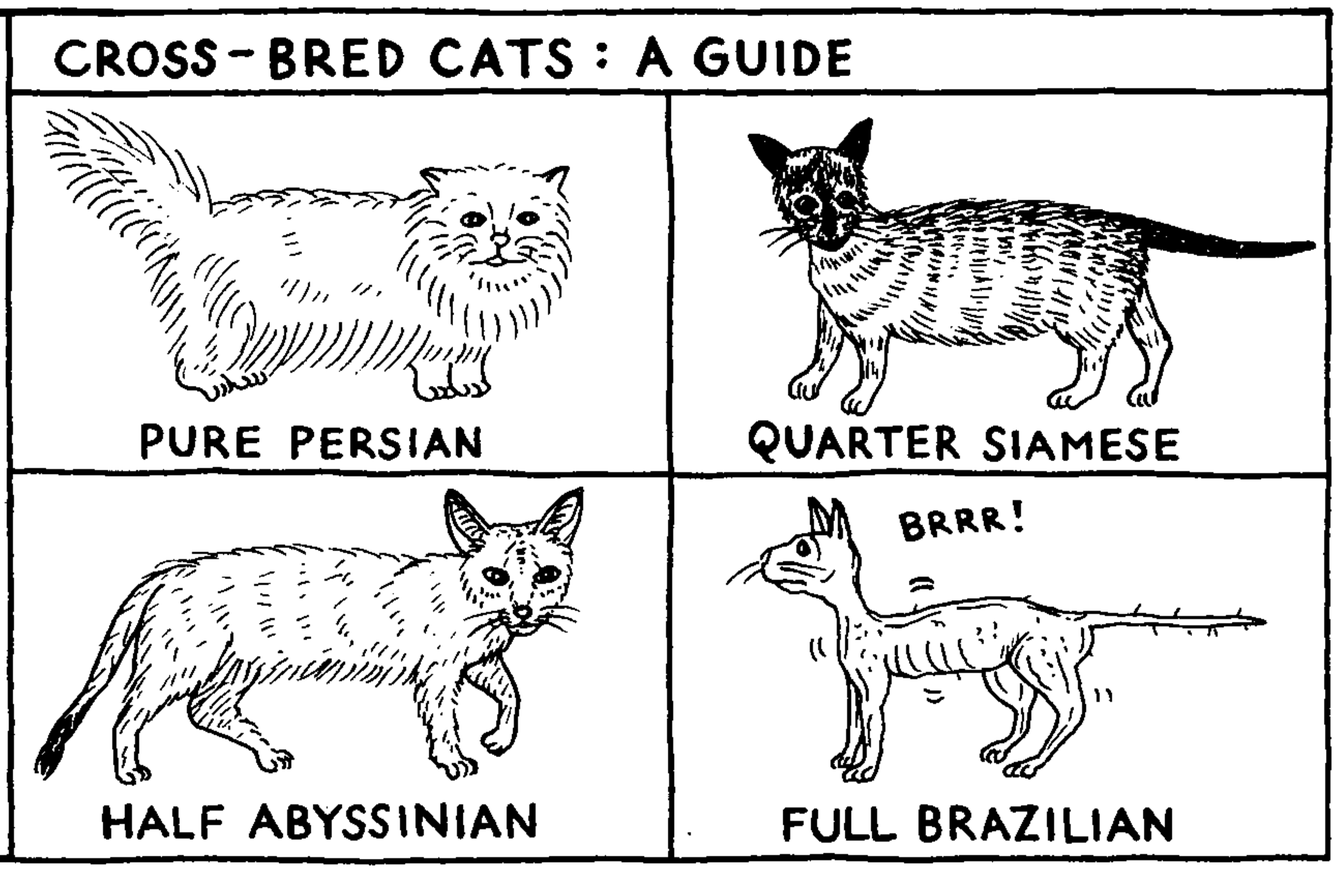
"We've saved a fortune relocating our children to Asia..."

EYE FEATURE

WHERE were you when you last read a piece asking where you were when you heard the news about *(Don't bother, Ed.)*

apparently BY MIKE BARFIELD

CROSS-BRED CATS : A GUIDE



ST ALBION PARISH NEWS

(twinned with Horsefly Gulch, Texas)

Incumbent: Rev (and Hon. Deputy Sheriff!) A.R.P. Blair MA (Oxon)

Howdy, folks!

You'll all have guessed why I've started this newsletter like that!

Yes, we've just had the most important visitor to the parish since I took over all those years ago!

And, hey, wasn't it amazing to see the world's top evangelist, the Rev. Dubya, actually here in St Albion's!

We've all seen pictures of him and read his inspiring exhortations to rid the world of Satan and "the powers of evilitude".

But here he was amongst us in the flesh! I don't mind admitting I haven't been so excited since we had the good fortune to welcome amongst us the Rev. Jefferson Clintstone of the Church of the Seven-Day Fornicators, with his good lady Monica!

But, I can tell you, when I shook hands with the Rev. Dubya, and he said "Hi there, Tiny!" in his slow Texan drawl, my heart skipped a beat. Except, of course, it didn't really skip a beat, because I'm absolutely fine, no matter what people say, and when I said "my heart skipped a beat", I was only using it figuratively, like Our Lord when he said "Blessed are the peacemakers", a text that has often been misinterpreted by people who take it too literally. What he really meant was "Blessed are the pacemakers", because that would help people with heart

problems. Not that I'm one of them obviously, as I've just told you. Anyway, I think I'm going to have to lie down for a while after all the excitement of the Rev. Dubya's visit!

So, instead of carrying on with this newsletter, I'm going to give you a real treat: the chance to read for yourselves the full text of the Rev. Dubya's awe-inspiring sermon, which unfortunately so few parishioners were able to hear, after Mr Blunkett of our Neighbourhood Watch called in 3000 heavily armed security guards to ring the church with a wall of steel, while the Rev. Dubya preached from inside a specially installed bullet-proof pulpit. (Incidentally, my apologies to all those members of the congregation who were unavoidably locked into the vestry over the weekend when the church was "sealed off" – but at least it was all in a good cause!)

Tony

That Rev. Dubya Sermon In Full

Brothers and sisters, here in Englandland.

Welcome to my world. And a very special brand of welcome to your good pastor, the Rev. Toby, and his good lady Queen Elizabeth, who have made us feel so at home in their beautiful Buckingham Hotel.

I salute my brother-in-arms, Toby, who has been prepared to make any sacrifice to support me in my great crusade to rid the world for once and for all of extreminosity and the power of Satan.

Toby has not worried for a moment what people here in Englandland might think of him! Even though he has had to face the whips and scorpions of his enemies in his own congregation, he has not for one second shirked from his duty to back me in all I am trying to do.

For, as it says in the Good Book, "Woe unto ye, when all shall speak well of you. Yea, verily and indeedy-do" *(Book of Moron).*

I have a dream, brothers and sisters. A dream of the Holy Landland changed in the twinkling of an eye. Where today there may be tyranny and evilitude, there may tomorrow be a reign of democracy and peacitude.

Is that not a vision worth pursuing? I say unto ye, yea, verily, yea!

And will you be with me, o people of Great Britainville, the heirs, are you not, of William Wilbursmith, who saved the world from slavery?

Our two peoples have always, down the centuries, fought together, as we did in the great wars of Suez and Vietnam.

And now we must pray together that the Lord may grant release from the burden of having to keep the peace in Iraqland (and, while he is about it, to grant also a second term to his right-hand man here on earth!).

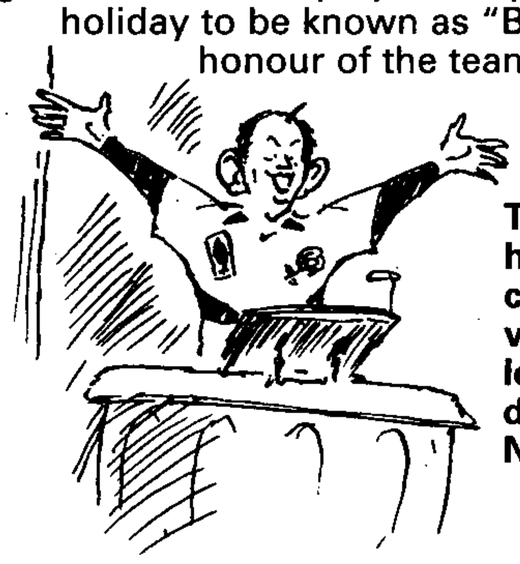
In this prayer, I am joined by Brother Colin and Sister Condy, who are here with me today, joining their prayers to your heartfelt shouts of "Go home, warmonger", which I know in your language means "Please stay here amongst us, for you are the bringer of peace".

And now let us all sing the Battle Hymn of the Republican party, 'Mine Eyes Have Seen The Glory Of The Coming Of Myself'*.

*Parishioners will of course recognise this in its more familiar English version 'Gordon Brown's body lies a-mouldering in the graveyard'!! T.B.

Congratulations!

May I offer my warmest congratulations on behalf of the parish to our splendid rugby team for their glorious victory over the weekend. Before I am accused of "jumping on the band wagon" or "hijacking" their great achievement can I make it clear that I have no desire to try and capitalise on their heroic feats. Instead I will be holding a simple low key champagne victory parade through the streets of the parish culminating in a grand firework display and a parish holiday to be known as "Blair Day" in honour of the team. T.B



The vicar in his new close-fitting vestment by local artist de la Nougerede!!

Talking Point

You know when one looks at the winning English rugby team one can't help thinking – yes, it's a team effort but in the end doesn't it all depend on one particularly brilliant player who can be relied upon to get it right at the important moments whilst the big thick so-called heavyweights lumber about behind him giving away penalties and making the star's job even harder??! Just a thought! T.B.

Parish Postbag

Dear Son-in-law,

You make me sick the way you cosy up to the Reverend Dubya. Well you can stick your rotten Britain up your

Yours sincerely
Tony Booth,
The Old Off-Licence,
The High Street.

The editor reserves the right to cut all letters. P.M.

Creche News

Mrs Hodge, the parish Children's Officer, has promised to take action over the terrible problem of abuse in the parish. She tells me that she has been suffering a lot of abuse recently, with people shouting "Resign, you dreadful woman" at her in the street. This must obviously stop at once. T.B.

That Bush Visit Souvenir

That U.S. Embassy Menu in full

Homily Brits

— ❋ —

Complete Hash

— ❋ —

Silly Burgers

That Blair/Bush State Banquet Menu in full

Brown Nose Windsor Soup

— ❋ —

Grovellax

— ❋ —

Iraq Of Lamb with Crispy Fried Poodles and Condoleezza Rice

— ❋ —

Toady-in-the-Hole

— ❋ —

Suckling Up To Bush Pig

— ❋ —

From Off The Trolley

Bored Queen Of Puddings

— ❋ —

Nigelly and Custard

— ❋ —

Death by Choc 'n' Awe

— ❋ —

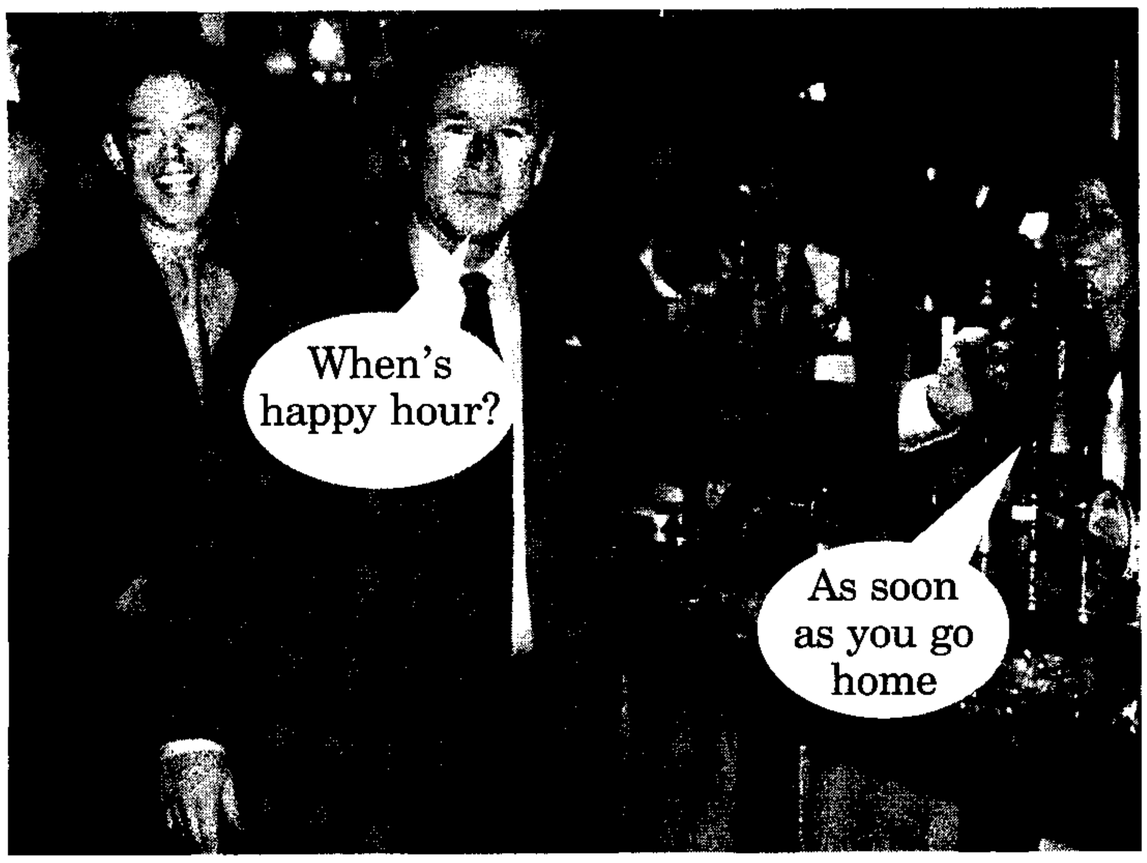
Coffee will not be served in case the Prime Minister suffers from a Cardiac Arrest

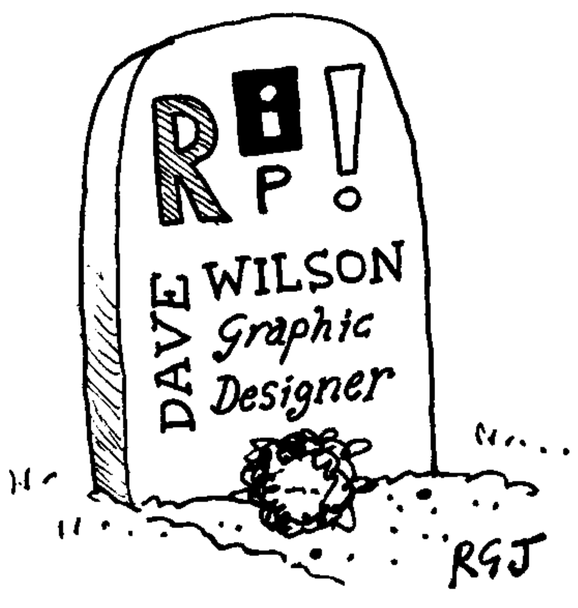
Down At The Old Blair And Bush

That Pub Menu in full*

PORKY PIES
MUSHY PEAS IN OUR TIME
STICKY SITUATION PUDDING
TO DRINK
PINT OF SPECIAL RELATIONSHIP

*WARNING: MAY CONTAIN NUTS



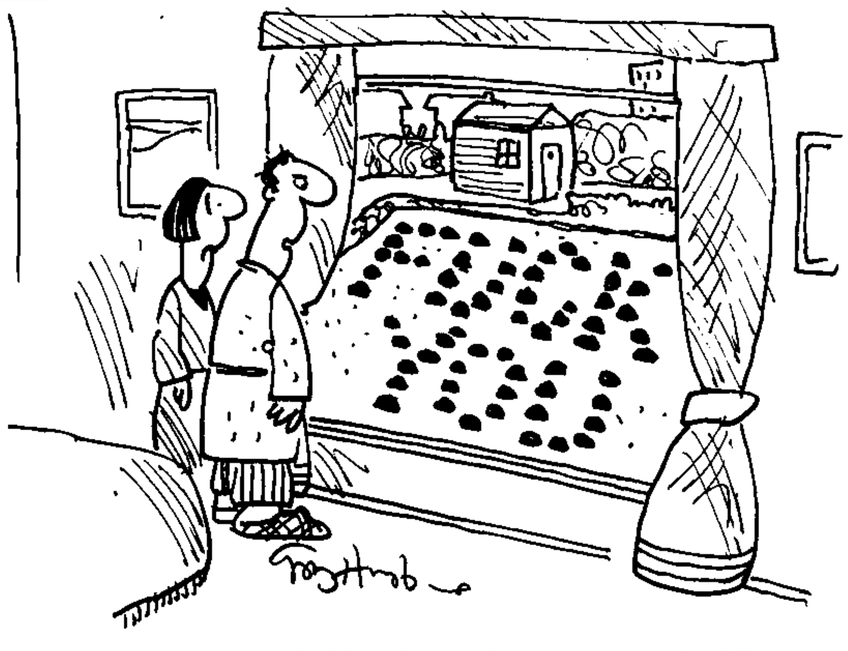


Over the next two days Mr and Mrs Bush will attend various functions and events, including a state banquet at the palace on Wednesday night and a meeting with British victims of September 11 and servicemen killed in the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Grauniad

Animal smuggling in Australia is not all one way. Last month officers arrested a man trying to enter the country with a snake in his trousers.

The Times



"Doesn't look like the mole traps worked"

Where They Stood On The Bush Visit

Simon Jenkins, author of 1000 Best British Bores

WHATEVER we think of President Bush and his ill-judged invasion of Iraq, it is important for us to show British good manners and hospitality. That is what the National Trust stands for.

Mayor Livingstone

George Bush is the biggest threat to planet earth since Darth Vader. If he had his way, he would kill all of us as if we were pigeons in Trafalgar Square. I urge all British newts to stand up and be counted.

Harold Pinter, playwright

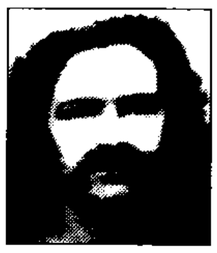
(Pause) I'd like to stand on Bush's head and kick his brains out. Not that he's got any. The bastard.

Lord Really-Smugg

I well remember the visit of Woodrow Wilson in 1918, when he was kind enough to have lunch with me at the Garrick. I cannot disclose what we discussed, but it would certainly make some of today's protestors look rather foolish.

Mark Steyn, columnist on the Bush Telegraph

The British should be out on the streets cheering. If it wasn't for the United States, the whole lot of you would have been speaking German and goose-stepping around like John Cleese. You're gutless and weak, all of you. No wonder you need Bush to save you! God Bless America!



Dave Spart (leader of the Neasden Stop The Iraq War, Troops Out, Anti-Globalisation, Ban Killer GMOs, Free Nepal Rainbow Alliance)

Er, basically, sickening, oil, er, neo-con imperialism, Fascist Bush, er, traitor Blair, er, that's it.

Andrew Motion, Poet Laureate

A small boy lies in the hospital
Without any arms
A poet sits at his desk
Without any ideas

(Will this do? A.M.)

Mike Gove (Cab No. 666)

Blimey, guy, those protestors bringing London to a standstill, what a cheek, they should all be strung up, mind you, we've been stuck here in this jam for three hours and we're looking at £180 on the clock, so it can't be bad, can it? Hats off to those protestors, that's what I say.

Gnome PRINCESS MARGARET Mug Offer

IN 2003 Princess Margaret Hodge won the hearts of the nation when she publicly apologised for smearing a former victim of child abuse, in a desperate bid to keep her job as Tony Blair's Minister for Children.

To commemorate this heart-warming moment in the history of our ancient nation, Gnome Potteries have commissioned world-famous ceramicist Sir Ralphonso Stoddoni to produce this beautiful likeness of one of Britain's most hated public figures.

The Princess Margaret Hodge mug comes in a limited edition of only 5 million personally signed in facsimile by the artist.

***PLUS* free with each order, five Princess Diane Abbott 'Hypocrite Plates', as advertised in our last issue.**

To reserve your imperishable heritage souvenir, send cash only (£89.99, inc p&p) to Gnome Mug Offer, Gary Glitter House, the Michael Jackson Trading Estate, Islington, London NBG.

NEW ZETA JONES THREAT

Saxon Fashion Victims

"Cool piercing, man"

What You Missed

MARY ANN BIGHEAD

THE STRAIN OF BEING A GENIUS

ALL my life I have suffered from a terrible affliction. I am so much cleverer than anyone else.

I have spent many years trying to explain this to people, but they are so thick that they don't seem to understand.

Why don't people like me? Is it because I am cleverer than them? *(Yes, you're fired. Ed.)*

Tune in to *'Drive 'Em Out Time'* with regular presenter Saddam Hussein on Tikrit FM

BAGHDAD TIMES

— FRIDAY NOVEMBER 28 2003 —

100 Dollars (or 2 cigarettes)

Put A Tigris In Your Tank – There Isn't Any Petrol

THOUSANDS OF US TROOPS STORM CAPITAL AND SEIZE PALACE

by Our Man In London
Comical Tariq Ali

The ancient city of London has never known anything like it.

Last night I watched with my own eyes as wave after wave of heavily armed US security personnel took over the capital with scarcely a shot being fired.

The streets were deserted as millions of inhabitants stayed at home to watch the rugby.

President Bush himself led the attack, first seizing the airport and then targeting the Palace, where Britain's religious leader Elizabeth II cowered in a cellar, terrified of being bored to death.

US propaganda chiefs had earlier predicted that the huge display of American firepower would be met by cheering crowds, grateful to the President for defending them against the weapons of mass destruction.

The Queen Mother Of Battles

But Londoners I spoke to were deeply resentful of the US invasion.

Said one, holding a 'Stop The War Banner', "We are fed up with the imperialist aggressor Bush and the puppet regime of his poodle Blair.

"We want to live in a country where the views of ordinary Londoners are *(cont'd. p. 94)*

What Not To Miss

FILM

Love Actually (15)

Richard Curtis's film tells of an impossibly foppish Prime Minister (Tony Blair) who falls head of heels in love with the most unlikely of people, the impishly cute President of the United States (George Bush).

TV

The Importance Of Being Famous (C4)

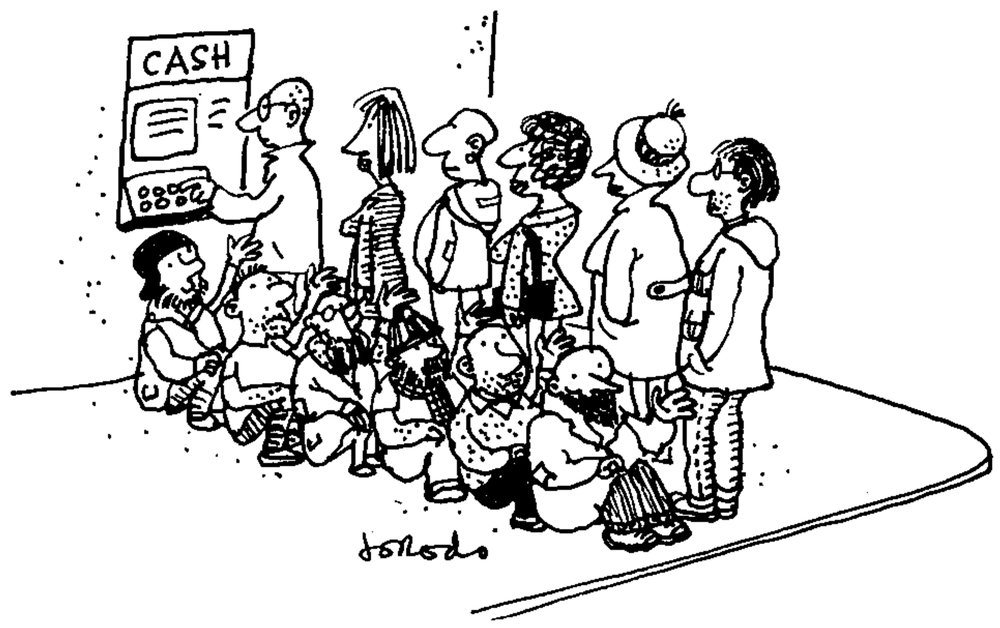
An investigation into the world of the Z-list celebrity which asks the question who are these people who are desperate to be famous and will do anything to get on TV? Presented by, er... Piers Moron.

Adult At Forty (C4)

A group of middle-aged commissioning editors from Channel 4 spend five days together in a room without access to sex-related programme proposals – the question is, will they be able to find other ways to fill the schedules? *No.*

Format Swap (All Channels)

What happens when ITV, BBC and Channel 4 schedulers swap formats by commissioning endless shows where people swap places with someone else? *Nothing very interesting.*



The Daily Telegraph

The Golden Boot

England's Day Of Glory

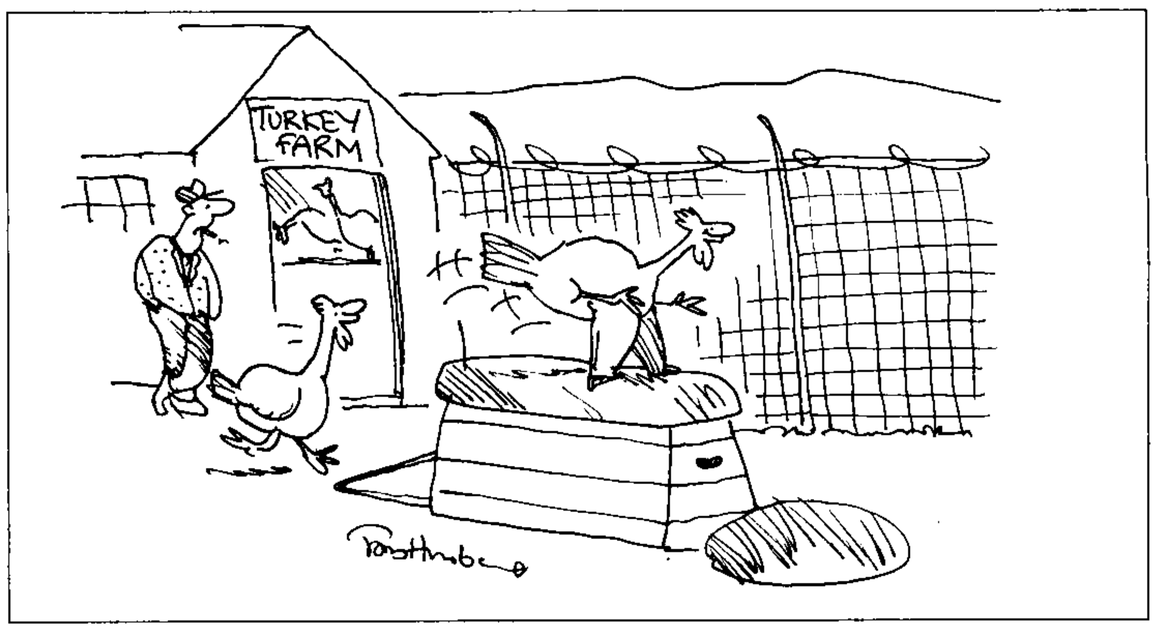
AS A nation we are perhaps over-acquainted with bad news and with failure in the great international arenas. But now all that is in the past. With one glorious kick Conrad Black has been booted out of the boardroom and millions of Englishmen can now hold their heads up high once again.

Let us all celebrate the great victory over *(You're fired. M. Newboy, Ed.)*

On Other Pages

■ **ALL BLACKS TROUNCED BY ANGRY SHAREHOLDERS**
All Blacks £200 million **Hollinger** 0 *(You're still fired. M.N.)*

■ **'IS THERE ANTI-BLACK PREJUDICE IN BRITAIN?' asks proprietor's wife Barbara Amiel** *(You're hired again. Ed.)*



BLAIR BACKS HODGE

GNOMEBY'S

Grand Auction Sale

(in connection with the winding-up of the Estate of Lord and Lady Black, due to impending litigation and possible imprisonment)

LOT ONE

Very Fine And Agreeable Old Newspaper (known as the *Daily Telegraph*), offering considerable scope for imaginative improvement by the right owner.

The lot includes ownership of:

1 Brand-new Editor, only slightly used.

1 Former Editor (1807 vintage), still in perfect working order, answers to name "Deedes".

Assorted Hacks, all well connected, many Old Etonians or Roman Catholics or both.

LOT TWO

Equally Fine And Agreeable Sunday Newspaper, with only two previous owners.

The lot includes:

1 Well-connected Editor, brother of famous TV chef plus wide selection of advertisements for Stannah stairlifts, walk-in baths and easy-to-use garden tools (no bending, no kneeling, no aching back!)

LOT THREE

Venerable Old Weekly Magazine, very stained with some spotting (the *Spectator*). Planning permission for demolition has been obtained. Offers ample scope for redevelopment as weekly news magazine, with interesting, well-written articles and amusing cartoons.

The lot also includes:

1 Celebrity Editor (as seen on TV).

1 Very Soiled Greek Drug Addict (past sell-by date).

Sale by auction to start immediately

What You Will See In Dirty Desmond's New-Look

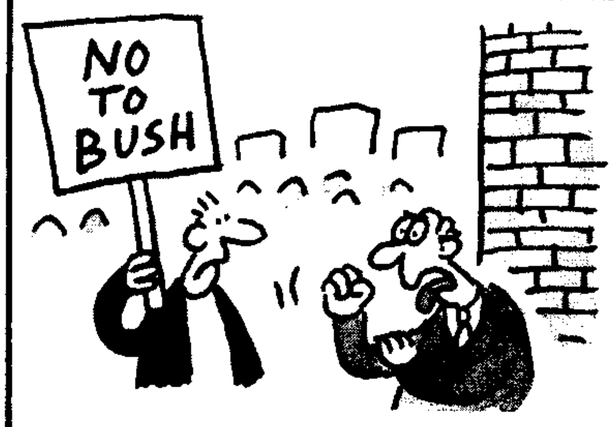
Daily Pornograph

- **LIZ HURLEY** starkers **1**
- **JANET DALEY** answers your sex problems **5**
- **W.F. DEEDES** on sex in your Nineties **6**
- **READERS' WIVES** (formerly 'Letters From Tunbridge Wells') **7**
- **ALEXANDER SHULMAN** – Why naked is the new look for this year **8**
- **SANDHEK SEVKU** reviews the new films, including *'Asian Babes – The Movie'* and *'Big Ones Live'* **9**
- **COMMENT** – "Get 'em off, darling" says Christopher Howse **12**
- **IN THE CITY** – Neil Collins wants the Bonk Rate increased

PLUS our new pocket billiard cartoonist **SMUTT**

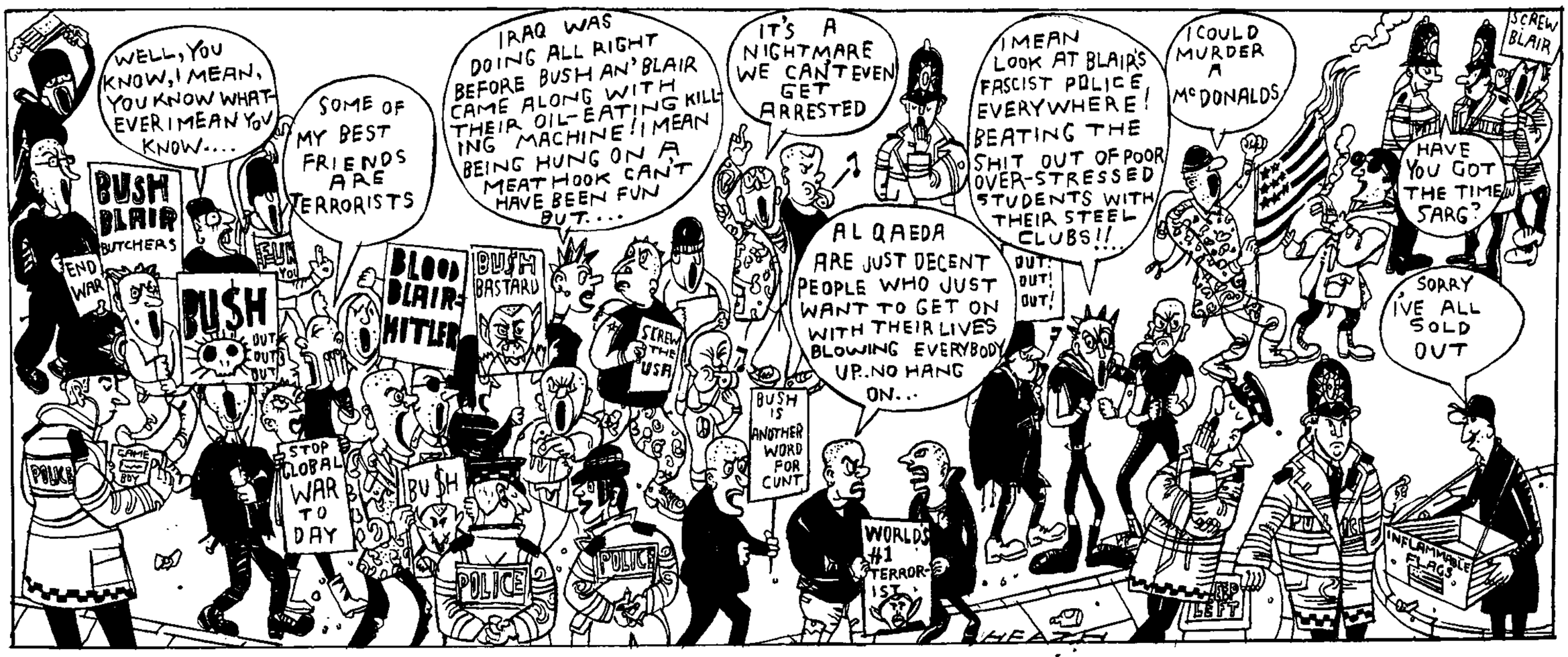
PLUS **BORIS JOHNSON** on his new-look magazine *'The Sextator'*!

SMUTT



Some of us want more Bush!!

Remember the slogan 'Read A Best-Selling Porn Mag Every Day'


WELL, YOU KNOW, I MEAN, YOU KNOW WHAT-EVER I MEAN YOU KNOW....
SOME OF MY BEST FRIENDS ARE TERRORISTS
IRAQ WAS DOING ALL RIGHT BEFORE BUSH AN' BLAIR CAME ALONG WITH THEIR OIL-EATING KILLING MACHINE!! I MEAN BEING HUNG ON A MEAT HOOK CAN'T HAVE BEEN FUN BUT...
IT'S A NIGHTMARE WE CAN'T EVEN GET ARRESTED
I MEAN LOOK AT BLAIR'S FASCIST POLICE EVERYWHERE! BEATING THE SHIT OUT OF POOR OVER-STRESSED STUDENTS WITH THEIR STEEL CLUBS!!...
I COULD MURDER A McDONALDS
SCREW BLAIR
HAVE YOU GOT THE TIME SARG?
SORRY IVE ALL SOLD OUT
AL QAEDA ARE JUST DECENT PEOPLE WHO JUST WANT TO GET ON WITH THEIR LIVES BLOWING EVERYBODY UP..NO HANG ON...
BUSH BLAIR BUTCHERS
END WAR
BUSH OUT OUT OUT
BLOOD BLAIR-HITLER
BUSH BASTARD
SCREW THE USA
STOP GLOBAL WAR TO DAY
BUSH
BUSH IS ANOTHER WORD FOR CUNT
WORLDS #1 TERROR-IST
OUT! OUT! OUT!
INFLAMMABLE FLAGS
POLICE

DAILY Mirror
Friday November 28 2003

THE PAPER THAT MAKES YOU GAG!
(SURELY 'THEY TRIED TO GAG'? ED)

MIRROR IMPOSTOR SENSATION

by Mirrorman **PIERS MORON**

IT SEEMS scarcely possible that someone like me can just walk in off the street and become editor of the Daily Mirror, with no questions asked!

Yet that is the incredible truth behind what they are calling the security scandal of the Millennium!

I had no qualifications for the job. When I was asked for a reference, I arranged for one of my mates in the pub to vouch for me down the phone.

As for my dodgy past, no one seemed to give it a second thought.

Within a day I was given the freedom of the paper's palatial headquarters, and I was allowed to go anywhere and do whatever I liked.

FOOT-IN-MOUTH-MAN

It was amazing. If I had wanted to, I could have made the paper look silly by adopting completely contradictory editorial standpoints every couple of weeks.

I could have gone on television to make important programmes about the evils of newspapers printing nothing but rubbish about celebrities.

I could even have put a reporter into Buckingham Palace and pretended I was doing it as a matter of national security.

But, almost unbelievably, I was able to sit in the top seat without being rumbled for seven years.

What was astonishing was that not once did anyone even challenge whether I should be there.

THE MORON SAYS

Why on earth wasn't I spotted and clapped in gaol as an obvious impostor?

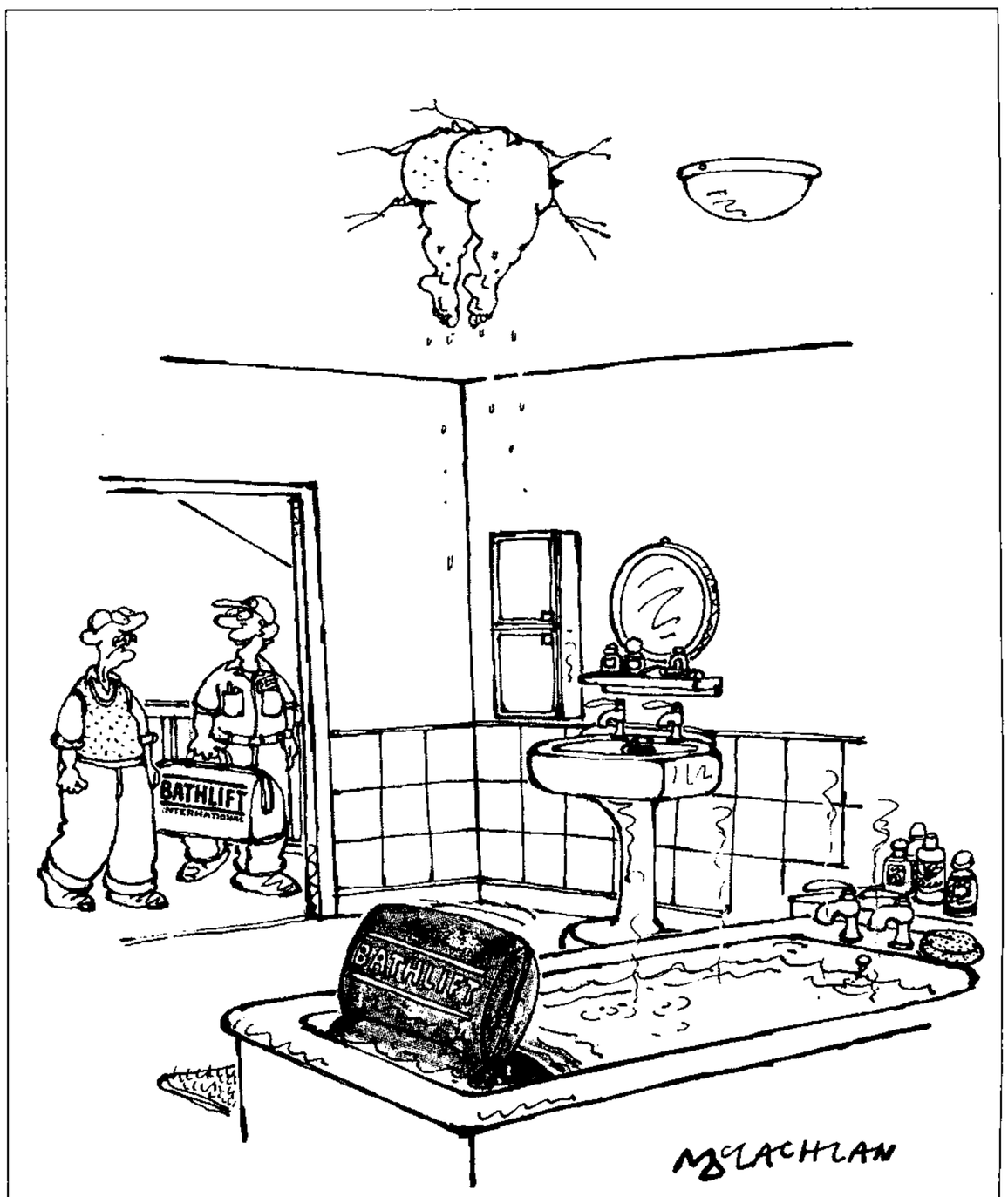
ON OTHER PAGES

Hundreds of pics of the inside of the Mirror building as you've never seen it before, including ● close-up shots of Sir Victor Blank's executive toilet ● long-range photo of car parking space reserved for Sir Victor ● seating plan for exclusive Mirror lunch with Cherie Blair ● compromising snatched pix of '3AM Girls' trying to find a story

THE WORLD OF THE ARTS

***Brian R Sewell** reviews an exhibition of the Queen's furniture in the pages of the Daily Mirror*

Eugh! One is instantly reminded of some dingy provincial hotel in Wolverhampton. One can almost taste the soggy Sunblest toast and the tiresome little plastic containers of that dubious substance which passes itself off as butter. And the very idea of dressing the table with that hideous bouquet of no-doubt plastic flowers, more suited to Golders Green crematorium than a respectable breakfast table. And, my dear, who eats breakfast with one of those vulgar little transistor wireless sets next to the coffee pot, no doubt permanently tuned to the inanities of Classic FM, with its steady drip of popular melodies. And that lamp! An ill-judged bargain purchased at some Sandringham car boot sale, perhaps? What are we to make of this phantasmagoria of suburban bad taste, this themeless pot pourri of petit-bourgeois banality, with its dralon tablecloth, easy to wash rayon duvets and, above all, Horror of Horrors, can this be true, a cornflakes container constructed from, wait for it, TUPPERWARE! *(At this point the author was overcome by such a fit of snobbery that he fainted away).*



"Now, what seems to be the problem with our product, sir?"

THIS WEEK

RICHARD CURTIS

People have said that all your spoons are the same. Is that fair?

Well, I do like a certain type of spoon and I am not going to apologise for that.

But they are very traditional, very middle-class, very English spoons, aren't they?

Yes, but I really think that everyone can relate to those sort of spoons. You don't have to have big American spoons, you know.

Do you think people will get bored of your type of feel-good spoon?

Well, with all the fear and hate in the world, why shouldn't we celebrate the virtues of the good old English spoon? For all its failings, it's a pretty decent sort of spoon.

In your latest film, you've cleverly interweaved a number of different stories, but none of them involve a spoon. Why is that?

Well, originally there was a strand about a dish running away with a spoon. They were in love, but it didn't work out. He was sterling silver, she was tupperware, and he had commitment problems, but they were reunited again on Christmas Eve at Heathrow airport after the spoon had made a mad dash across London in the snow accompanied by a choir of children singing "All you need is spoons".

That sounds great. Why didn't it make the final cut?

In the end it was just too dark a story for comedy.

NEXT WEEK: Michael Foot – *"Me and My Foot."*

THE ORIGINAL STREET NAMES OF OLD LONDON: WEST END CHRISTMAS

Radio Highlights

What You Missed

Edward Stourton *(for it is he)*: Gordon Brown, we're very privileged to have you in the studio to discuss your speech today to the CBI conference, in which you will be setting out your views on the economy.

G. Brown: Good morning, Mr Stourton. The important thing to remember is that in the past seven years we have consistently managed to maintain a higher rate of growth than any of our competitors in the eurozone...

Stourton: Is it true that you and Mr Blair are not on speaking terms?

Brown: ...and if you look at the unemployment rates of Germany and France compared with that in the UK...

Stourton: But it is true that you hate him, isn't it?

Brown: ...inflation remains well within the threshold laid down by the MPC...

Stourton: You're surely not denying that you went round the other night armed with a bread knife and threatened to kill him unless he gave you the job...

Brown: ...as you know, I handed over to the Bank of England the power to decide these things, so it is up to the Committee to decide whether a further increase is necessary.

Stourton: Chancellor, thank you very much. And now Thought For The Day with Sir Ludicrous Kennedy, the Chief Euthanasiast.

Kennedy: I was on my way to murder an old friend the other day, when I heard the news that the Welsh football team had failed to qualify for the finals of Euro 2004. And you know *(cont 94 Khz)*

HATS OFF TO OUR THIRTEEN HEROES!

BY SALLY JOCKSTRAP

The Eye's Voice Of Sport

THE incredible victory of the English Hockey Team over the hated New Zealand Springboks has lifted British spirits to a new high. Not since 1966, when Geoff Boycott scored the winning run against Western Samoa in the Ryder Cup Final and the umpire Dickie Bird made his now legendary remark, "I think it's over, gentlemen. It's time for lunch", has a British team given us so much to be proud of. And Jonny Watkinson has rightfully written himself into the Hall of British Sporting Fame, along with legends like tennis' Norman Mansell, horse racing's Virginia Bottomley and the great Olympic darts pair Matthew Paris and Sir Michael Redgrave. Come on, Your Majesty, and give England Coach Edward Woodward a chance to be king!

Here they are, Sally's World Cup Wonderboys

- **Edward Sheverdnaze** – The Georgians don't want him, but he can be the red under my bed any day!!? Geddit???!?
- **Michael Jackson** – I like boys in my bed too!!!? Geddit??!??!
- **Paul Wolfowitz** – crazy name, seriously crazy guy!!?!

Byeeeee!!!!!

© Sally Jockstrap with additional reporting by Glenda Slagg

JACKSON RACISM CLAIM

the PREMIERSH*TS

PAUL WOOD
THIS NIGHTCLUB'S CRAP, THERE'S NOTHING TO LOOK AT!
I'VE NEVER SEEN SO MANY SLAPPERS WITH BEER BELLIES...
YEH, I I BLAME THE RUGBY
MMM, A REAL MAN
DON'T THEY KNOW WHO I AM?!!

DIARY

CHAPMAN BROTHERS

Jake Chapman: For the past seven years we have been trajectorising the downsize of the paradigm shift in our culture in a work-in-progress called –

Dinos Chapman: Fuckface. It's called Fuckface. It's basically like kind of a pubescent face with two penises where the eyes should be.

Jake: Essentially it represents an attempt to recuperate the issue back to the reclassication of its own symptoms vis-a-vis the recuperation of an attempt at representation.

Norman Rosenthal: Marvellous! I find it a tremendously powerful work. I am amazed by it and find it really incredibly beautiful. One has this pubescent face, and instead of eyes it has, it has, it has –

Jake: Cocks.

Rosenthal: Quite. Quite. It's a very complex work of art, full of ambiguity and eternal contradiction. On the one hand, we have this pubescent face, and on the other hand, on the other hand we have, we have –

Jake: Cocks.

Sir Nicholas Serota: Fuckface explores issues of colonialism, capitalism, racism and globalisation in the early part of the 21st century. It poses very real questions about the hypocrisies inherent in our contemporary post-9/11 culture, and, if I may say so, boys, is fuelled by your unerring instinct for cultural anxiety, extenuated and enhanced by a darkly ironic –

Dinos: Wanker.

Serota: Mm?

Dinos: Wanker.

Serota: Wanker? That's not in my current catalogue? Is it perchance a work-in-progress? It sounds very exciting, and if at all possible on its completion I greatly look forward to viewing it.

Dinos: No. You're the wanker.

Serota: Me? Oh! Marvellous! That's to me a very thrilling, very... stimulating observation, offering plenty of food for thought at this, the apex of a cultural tide-change.

Rosenthal: Boys, boys, boys. You called him a wanker. Why didn't you call me a wanker too? Go on, say it, I can take it – it's because you don't like me, isn't it?

Jake: Tosser.

Rosenthal: Me? Tosser?

Jake: Yeah, you – tosser.

Rosenthal: Oh, thank you, thank you. With that dark irony of yours, I must say you really do transcend your age, boys.

Serota: Which artists do you have an innate, as it were, taking the dialectic into account, inherently, looked at in a highly visceral way, would you say, ah. Let me put it another way, who are your favourite artists?

Jake: Not Picasso

Dinos: He was, like, an ape with an easel, an ape with its head cut off by an axe, or piano-wire, or slowly sawed off with this great big –

Jake: Picasso knew nothing about art. He was just a deeply cynical and incredibly vulgar little Spaniard.

Rosenthal: Oh dear. One has always rather admired him. Up to now. But I'm tremendously grateful to you both for showing me the error of my ways, as it were. I suppose, on reflection, Picasso is somewhat flawed. In terms of his...well, his perception of reality. And so forth.

Dinos: Rembrandt's pretty good crap, too.

Jake: Rembrandt! Ha! He appeals exclusively to all those little old ladies with their little old hats and coats, twittering nonsense, stuffed full of Prozac and PG Tips while they await their turn to be released from their vacuous parasitic lives in some hermaneutic hospital ward peopled by so-called medical staff remorselessly dedicated to the long overdue murder of worthless citizens.

Dinos: Adolf Hitler was a good artist.

Jake: Within the severe societal constraints of the outmoded representational watercolour genre. But at least his vision was transgressive, unlike some I could name.

Serota: Adolf Hitler! That's a profoundly original thought! Deeply disturbing, yes – but also HUGELY exciting! I welcome this bravura debate. Indeed I do. It's by turns shocking, amusing, stimulating, powerfully provocative and *viscerally horrifying*.

Dinos: And Harold Shipman. He was a good artist, for a doctor.

Serota: Ah, yes – Shipman! A most necessary reminder that the inclusion of his work on The Turner Prize shortlist is really long overdue. Some might find it shocking, yes – but then it has always been the artist's duty to shock. Now, tell me, lads – what are you working on next?

Jake: We're exploring the spineless manner the liberal intelligentsia, particularly those of them working within the mileu of the visual arts, are happy to sacrifice all their beliefs, aesthetic, philosophic and moral, in order to lick the arses of the modish and the celebrated.

Rosenthal: That sounds marvellously complex and ambitious, exploring powerful new territory in a way that is both, er, powerful, er, yes, powerful and new and, er, yes, deeply exploratory.

Serota: This new work. What does it, as it were, *involve*?

Dinos: Basically, its a conceptual work called PISSPOT involving Jake and me tanking ourselves up –

Jake: – that is, passing an extreme volume of liquid down the oesophagus into the stomach –

Dinos: – then waiting a few hours until we are both fit to burst –

Jake: – then asking you two gentlemen –

Dinos: – namely you, Wanker, and you, Tosser –

Jake: – to lie naked on the gallery floor –

Dinos: – while we pull out our male genitalia –

Jake: – and piss all over you.

Serota: So you are, in a very real way, aestheticising the act of urination, turning what society regards as an essentially private act into something very real and very public. To me, PISSPOT explores crucial issues, posing profound questions whilst refusing to provide easy answers.

Rosenthal: But you're not going to urinate over Serota first are you? That's SO unfair! It's MY turn! I'm just as good at being pissed over as he is! Okay, I'm not playing any more!

As told to
CRAIG BROWN

GARY YOU'RE DOING PRETTY WELL FIGHTING YOUR SUBSTANCE ABUSE PROBLEM...
THANKS, DOCTOR...
BUT YOU CAN'T BEAT THIS THING ON YOUR OWN... YOU NEED PEOPLE YOU CAN CALL ON WHEN THE GOING GETS TOUGH.
I THINK YOU SHOULD JOIN A SUPPORT GROUP, GARY.
SHAKE
I CAN'T DO THAT 'COS OF WHO I AM, DOCTOR.
I'VE NEVER BEEN IN A SUPPORT BAND IN MY LIFE! I'M STRICTLY A HEADLINE ACT!
BAM!

Literary Review

Blurred vision

Our Lady of the Forest
David Guterson
(Bloomsbury, £16.99)

DAVID GUTERSON made his name with *Snow Falling on Cedars*, a murder mystery set in an island community in the Pacific North West. A surprise bestseller, it proved a great hit with book groups. There is even a Cliffs Notes commentary on it, a student's crib to help those members of the group who didn't quite manage to get through the novel itself but want to join the discussion of its ishoos (love, hate and racism during and after the Second World War).

What is less well known about Guterson is that, as a teacher, he has also written a book on home schooling, called *Family Matters*.

This didactic and pedagogic background helps explain why, though its subject is not unpromising, Guterson's latest novel is so worthy and dull. A young girl claims to have seen visions of the Virgin Mary in the forest. The girl is a teenage runaway, with a history of sexual abuse, petty theft and drugs, who makes a meagre living from picking mushrooms. Though unbaptised, she has recently picked up a religious habit, mumbling the rosary and mugging up the holy mysteries from a stolen catechism.

In accordance with the usual Marian practice, it is to this troubled and unreliable witness that Our Lady decides to appear. One does not need to think up historical examples because Guterson (perhaps to obviate the need for a Cliffs Notes commentary) manages to work all the usual suspects into the text: St Thérèse of Lisieux, St Bernardette of Lourdes, Sister Mildred of the Sisters of the Precious Blood in Fostoria, Ohio, and their equivalents at Fatima, Knock and Medjugorje. (There are also handy references, for brainier members of the reading group, to Pascal, Berkeley and TS Eliot.)

The story takes place in a rundown logging town where even the parish priest lives in a trailer park and everyone talks like a moron. In short. Blunt. Sentences. Unemployed lumberjacks sit around in dreary bars discussing their divorces and the money still owed to the bank for their repossessed logging equipment. The church is locked and smells of mildew. The main local employer is the local prison. All this conforms dutifully with the dictates of Dirty Realism, just as the forest itself – dark, mossy, mysterious – conforms to the archetype of fairy tale.

The characters, too, are archetypes. The doubting priest, tempted by a sin of the flesh that is all too readily at hand. The fake believer who exploits the visionary's fame and her followers' charity. The bankrupt lumberjack with a restraining order to stop him bothering his wife and the son crippled in a logging accident. The small town sheriff who can't cope with the big event. The pompous cleric from the bishop's office who comes to investigate the apparitions. Plus of course the girl herself (see above) and her supernatural interlocutrix.

Given these predictable ingredients, the plot more or less writes itself. The girl tells her friend, the cynic, about the apparitions. They tell the priest and the bishop sends the inquisitor. People get to hear about it and each time the girl revisits the spot, a larger crowd tags along. A circus of Catholic pilgrims and apparition-spotters descends on the town, swamping its campsite, trampling the forest and littering it with petitions, flowers and statuettes of the Virgin Mary bought from mobile religious merchandisers. The cynic passes round the bucket and everyone coughs up the cash (which the cynic plans to spend on a grand vacation).

No one else sees the apparition, but they witness the girl's trance-like ecstasies and pray like crazy for her help in curing their bunions and quitting smoking. Even the brutish logger (or "hewer of wood") with the crippled son succumbs to the hysteria and gets himself a plastic bottle to fill with the holy water which (naturally) springs from the ground in the very spot where Our Lady has told the girl to delve.

So what's Mary's message to the planet? The faithful must renew their service, the selfish and greedy must change their ways, for the Son of the Father is grown mighty angry at the evil ways of the world and there will be dire consequences if sin is not thwarted and a new church must be built to mark this spot.

Nothing very surprising there; and indeed there is nothing surprising in the whole book. That's really the problem. Guterson seems terrified of offending anyone and though he gives the apparition some brief, suitably Prayer Bookish dialogue, he never indicates whether he believes in it or not. He allows both sceptics and believers more or less equal air-time while leaving the story to run itself to its fairly obvious conclusion. The girl dies and her followers ransack the place for relics, the priest gets his nice new church that doesn't smell of mildew, the cynic and the tough guy achieve a limited redemption but none of the miracle cures is verified. So what if it was all a dream? What if it was? So what? Discuss.

Conspiracy theory

Love
Toni Morrison
(Chatto & Windus, £16.99)

THE white, male, English critic who presumes to confront one of these black, Afro-Carribean literary queens – some names I could mention apart from Ms Morrison here are Maya Angelou and Terry McMillan – in their lair knows that he can start by leaving his principles out there in the yard with the trash can and the welcome mat.

He will be aware that what lies before him on the printed page is, according to his set of values, pretty much tosh; but he will also be aware, if he has any sensitivity, that he cannot actually say this, and that what he can bring himself to say will have scarcely anything to do with literature itself.

Worse, a deeply futile argument on the subject of literary political correctness will immediately be set in train in his head, in which each strophe and antistrophe is instantly neutralised by its predictability. *A: This stuff is crap. B: Yes, but it's their stuff isn't it? And we all know the canon of western literature was created by white male Englishmen. A: Ah, but surely anyone who wins a Nobel prize must want to play by the rules? I mean, Toni here is, among other things, a professor of literature and presumably certain professional standards apply? B: Yes indeed, but you invented those standards, and what if the traditions she and her chums espouse are different from yours?* And so on, in an endless call and response unwinnable by either side, in which generalisations become pointless and the debate is perhaps better approached by way of individual books.

Love, Ms Morrison's eighth work of fiction, is such a book. Its subject is the legacy – literal and abstract – bequeathed to his descendants by a black hotel proprietor named Bill Cosey, mine host, back in mid-20th century America, of a beachside pleasure palace where his fellow citizens could cavort and socialise in a fair imitation of the white folks.

Long years later, Cosey's dead and not ungrubbied hand still reaches out to interfere with the equanimity of those still living: Heed, his relict, Christine his grand-daughter (Christine is actually a few months senior to Heed, in whose house she resides, but there you are), Vida, an ex-employee, whose grandson Ruben does odd jobs for the Cosey women, and "L", the establishment's former cook. Matters are galvanised into action by the arrival of high-stepping street-babe Junior, who devils for Heed, shags Ruben senseless and generally starts shifting the stale air around like billy-oh.

As for the world thereby conjured into view, it is at once segregated (no white character ever makes it onto the stage) folksy ("Drown this boy, Vida" grandpa Sandler enjoins, "He don't know a favor from a fart") and curiously equivocal about the whole notion of racial aspiration. Some particularly tart observations – ascribed to

SNIPCOCK & TWEED
THAT BLOODY AMERICAN COMES HERE, TAKES OVER AND EVERYONE SUCKS UP TO HIM!
BUSH OFF
GO HOME - AND TAKE YOUR SILLY HAT WITH YOU!
DOOD! WHERE'S MY RAZOR?
MICHAEL MOORE BOOK SIGNING

Christine, but tart nonetheless – attach themselves to "those lawyer-type black girls, full of themselves, despising women of Heed's generation who had more business sense in their tooth fillings than those educated half-wits would ever know." Ex-hooker or college girl – somehow you're still whitey's stooge.

Then, quite apart from the racial politics, there is the writing itself, which would in normal circumstances have been cut to bits by an editor. But Ms M, you see, is a Nobel laureate-cum-literary Aphrodite, and she calls the shots. This is an amiable little conspiracy, in which we are all incriminated, and further proof, if any were needed, that hardly anything which gets written about books these days is to do with the books themselves.

Giles Gordon

GILES GORDON, the writer and literary agent who contributed to the *Eye*'s World of Books and Books & Bookmen features for many years, has died as a result of a fall at his Edinburgh home.

A man of immense charm, Giles combined a passion for books and good writing with a love of mischief and gossip.

As a journalist, he flourished at a time when the publishing world was still in the hands of all-powerful and often eccentric individuals – George "Popeye" Weidenfeld, Andre Deutsch, Tom Maschler, "Sir Sincere" Stevenson and others. This galère formed the cast of Giles' columns.

In the eighties, this cosy world began to change as the little firms were swallowed up by big conglomerates. Giles reported how when Reed took over Methuen, the new owners tried to discourage authors from coming into the building as they tended to make a mess with their untidy manuscripts. Collins was bought by Murdoch whose henchman Eddie "McBastard" Bell became a favourite target of Giles.

Giles had considerable powers of foresight and was invariably able to predict the Booker prize winner. His gossip, his warmth and his boyish enthusiasms will be much missed.

New Bookworm Adds...

The untimely death of Giles Gordon leaves the book world a less amusing place. Agent, author, bon vivant and custodian of this column, Giles was fun.

However, he could also be deadly serious, particularly when it came to representing his authors. Some suggest that as an agent, he was at least partially responsible for pushing authors' advances into the stratosphere. After all, was it not Giles who asked Christopher Sinclair-Stevenson for £1m for Peter Ackroyd's biographies of Charles Dickens and William Blake (finally, they agreed on £650,000 — still an amazing sum for a publisher to pay back in 1989)? And what of the £1.3m Giles got from Time Warner for Vikram Seth's forthcoming book *Two Lives*?

All true enough; but Giles's main concern was representing real writers: Seth's advance is still only two-thirds what Penguin paid Paul Burrell.

Giles had been a writer himself, so he knew the financial imperatives. He had also been a publisher himself, for the likes of Hutchinson and Gollancz, so he'd seen the rough deals that authors then received and the joy with which his paymasters stuck to their stingy contracts. As an agent, he set about redressing the balance with some success. That things have now gone too far in the other direction is less a reflection on Giles' rapacity than on publishers' tendency to follow blindly whatever the opposition is doing, only at greater expense. RIP Giles Gordon.

Books & Bookman

■ TUCKED into the back of AS Byatt's *The Little Black Book of Stories* (Chatto & Windus, £12) is the tale of an elderly man caring for his once fiercely intelligent but now Alzheimer-afflicted wife. She likes watching the *Teletubbies* so he buys her a soft toy of Dipsy (the bile-green one).

At night while his wife's asleep, he repeatedly stabs it with a hatpin, revenging his ancient jealousies on the harmless effigy. This cannot, surely, be a thinly-disguised portrait of the troubled Murdoch/Bayley marriage?

Byatt herself is a keen Irisian, author of an admiring critical study, *Degrees of Freedom: The Novels of Iris Murdoch*. Perhaps she is one of those who now feel bumbling Bayley betrayed his wife and exploited her mental weakness in his gossipy big-hug'n'tell.

As Dipsy would say: Uh-oh!

'Bookworm'

WHAT YOU DIDN'T MISS, Pt 94

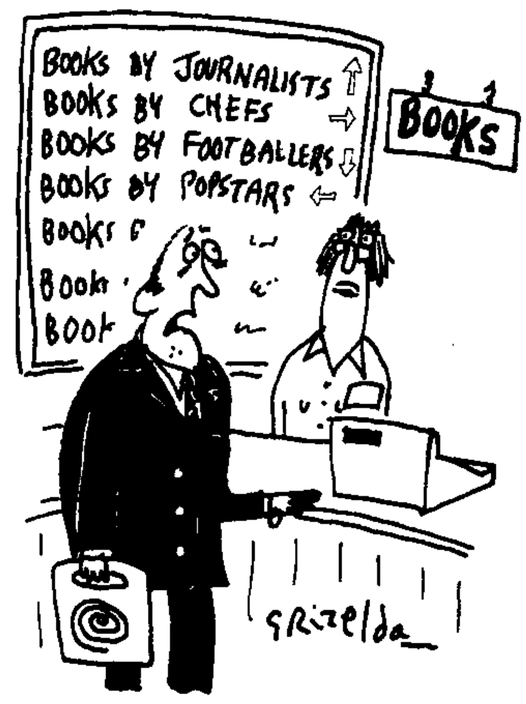
The Meaning of Everything: The Story of the Oxford English Dictionary
Simon Winchester
(Oxford University Press)

Winchester n. and vb. t. & i. Relentlessly prolific author of short, popular works on serious subjects: "You've written another book? You'll be turning into a Winchester."

Winchester treatment, given the (of book publishing) somewhat slight work benefiting from scholarly reputation of publisher.

Write like Winchester, to Prose style of extreme banality, featuring much use of redundant phrases such as "as it happened", "it is worth remembering" and "as already mentioned" in which quarrels "smoulder for some years" before "bursting out into the open" in "a torrent of abuse". "This won't do at all boy. You're starting to write like Winchester."

Winchester effect, the Delusion, affecting pred. American critics, whereby weak, derivative book is acclaimed as work of genius. "Winchester is an extraordinarily graceful writer. He may be the world's greatest crafter of smooth transitions, and he has the good sense never to resist an irresistible digression" — *Time Magazine*.



"Do you have any books by writers?"

Pseuds Corner

Whenever I go back to Selfridges these days I feel like *Le Grand Meaulnes*, questing in vain for his vanished domain.

JAMES DELINGPOLE 'on his constant search for the perfect pair of denims',
Times

Sting asks to be read metaphorically. He is trying, he explains, to "remake the drab prose of my life into some kind of transcendent poetry." So the line "we move together effortlessly like synchronised swimmers in a sea of longing" refers not, as one might expect, to his girlfriend, but to Mr Wilson, his boss in the tax office. Before he became a pop star, Sting had worked for the Inland Revenue.

EMMA BROCKES interviews Sting
Guardian

I think cancer – I'm not an expert or a doctor – but I think cancer is the result of undigested dreams and forcing yourself to do something that is not distinctively you.

STING
Guardian

I Played Frisbee with Jesus: Media, Print and the Cult of Personality

Professorial Lecture delivered by David Finkelstein, Professor of Media and Print Culture, Queen Margaret University College, Edinburgh

The 15th century may have seen a renaissance in Europe's art, architecture and sciences, but it took until 2002 for the same rebirth to take place in the context of restaurants in and around Preston.

Hi-Life Diners' Club North-West – Restaurant Directory 2003/4

A class warrior, dandy and intellectual, [Mark E.] Smith is one of nature's aristocrats. Born and raised in Salford, he is now resident in Prestwich, North Manchester. His performances with The Fall – delivering the elaborate code of his lyrics in plosive, spoken bursts from the corner of his mouth, across rigid, relentless repetitions of rock chords – can seem virtually shamanic. He is Beuysian in this respect.

MICHAEL BRACEWELL
Guardian Weekend

Pseuds Corporate

Homeless Charity Centrepoint has unveiled its new logo and strapline. The tagline now reads: "8.59 Centrepoint: What's Next for Young People", which replaces "Housing Young People at Risk". The charity designed the logo and strapline to convey its mission of working to give all disadvantaged young people a better chance in life. "8.59 is a time that's full of anticipation, potential and hope" said a spokesperson.

***Third Sector* magazine**

The magazine will become known as MT. Management and Today are quite tricky concepts, whereas MT is stronger and more confident.

MATTHEW GWYTHER, editor
***Management Today*, quoted in**
UK Press Gazette

CONTRIBUTORS: John Naylor, Eamonn O'Neill, Paul Doyle, Iain G. Brown, Chris Gill, Howard S. Goodman, M. Dear, Gareth Mytton.

£10 paid for all entries

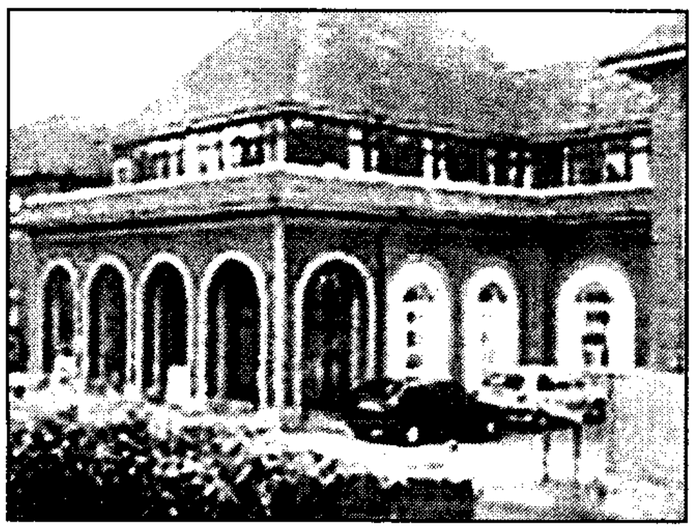
IN THE BACK

KPMG 1

BENENDEN OVER?

A HUNDRED years ago a philanthropist called Charles Garland, worried by the high incidence of tuberculosis in the civil service and post office, founded the Post Office and Civil Service Society Sanatorium Society.

He built a large sanatorium, later called the Benenden Hospital (pictured), on Kentish farmland, and encouraged civil servants and postal workers to join his society. Subscription rates were extremely low (even now they are only £1.05 a week). In return members who fell ill got free access to the Benenden Hospital and its medical services.



The membership grew steadily to include all public sector workers and their families. The name was changed to the Benenden Healthcare Society and services at the hospital were successfully expanded to include most surgical specialities. The society now has more than a million members and its income of £1m a week was easily able to pay for the running of the hospital and the placing of patients in other hospitals, both NHS and private. Thus the system worked well… until this year.

Last year the society's committee, without consulting the members, commissioned a report from KPMG, one of the country's big four accountants. The report was due this May, but when the biennial conference of the society's members met in that month, there was no sign of the report and members had no idea of future plans for the hospital. Just three days after the conference, however, the management committee accepted the report and its recommendations for drastic "restructuring" of the hospital. The report was not published.

Asked why the decision to act on the report was not submitted to the members' conference, a spokeswoman for the society said the report was not completed until after the conference. She explained, moreover: "The report contains commercially sensitive information and was circulated in confidence." The report cost the society £1m. The management committee also agreed that if the report's recommendations were carried out swiftly, KPMG would get a bonus of £250,000.

Ever since, the hospital which had been kept busy for 100 years, has been rapidly run down. The society agrees that 140 full-time jobs have been lost – "30 percent plus" of the total. Bed occupancy, last year 100 percent, has slumped to 40 percent. The medical unit has almost disappeared. Urology, notoriously inadequate in the NHS in Kent, has all but vanished. The atmosphere at the hospital is despondent and 250 workers, half the total, have applied for redundancy.

The society insists that despite the job losses more and more people are being treated at the hospital. This is due, it says, to modern medical practices. It regrets the loss of staff, but accepts that "these reductions are necessary" and says it is publicly committed to "maintaining the hospital as its flagship".

This view is not shared by staff, many of whom suspect the hospital will be run down and sold off. The proceeds of such a sale in prime land in Kent, they believe, will be enormous. This is indignantly denied by the society. Who is right? Watch this space.

Guess who!

CAN you guess the name of the big accounting firm that is being very closely investigated for its role in the scandal at Hollinger, widely known as the Black Hole? Yes, you can. It's KPMG.

KPMG 2

UNDER THE HAMERSLY

"WE WILL continue to lead the industry in helping restore public confidence in the accounting profession." So said Mike Rake, chairman of KPMG International, responding to his firm's decision to split its accountancy business from its legal arm, Klegal — a decision forced on it by US regulators.

Meanwhile KPMG continues to be embarrassed by evidence given in public to the US senate finance committee about its activities. It was a rotten day for KPMG when its former senior employee, Michael Hamersly (who is still technically employed but has been denied access to all the firm's facilities) spat out a long string of allegations about KPMG's involvement in what he called "abusive tax shelters".

Within those shelters he had observed "deliberate distortion of tax law" and an "utter disrespect for the law and those who enforce it". He made many specific allegations about inventing facts to make tax avoidance schemes work, hiding awkward facts from the tax authorities, lying over the risk to clients, concealing flaws in schemes and "questionable" billing practices. Moreover, he alleged in evidence that the firm's auditing work was used as a sales opportunity for tax avoidance schemes.

Helped by Mr Hamersly and others, the US senate is discovering that tax avoidance is not (as it used to be) a grubby sideline run by a few minor and disreputable companies. It is a mainstream operation run by the Big Four accountants. These activities by the Big Four are every bit as prominent in Britain as they are in the US. In a recent *Guardian* pamphlet, Prem Sikka, an academic expert on these matters, calls for an investigation by the treasury select committee similar to that being run by the US senate.

PS: All the Big Four firms continue to weep publicly about hard times. Last week Ernst & Young chairman Nick Land hailed his firm's annual results as a "good achievement in what has been the toughest market I can recall". In the year to June, average profit per partner was up a mere 26 percent, to £478,000.

HEPATITIS C

MORE BAD BLOOD

HARRIET BULLOCK recorded every detail of the protracted death from liver failure of her husband Kenneth, a haemophiliac who was fatally infected with hepatitis C back in 1982 when he had a tooth removed.

Mr Bullock was exposed to blood products when he was given clotting treatment and two transfusions. As his condition deteriorated, his only hope was a liver transplant. Although he was finally put on a non-urgent transplant list with a wait of anything up to six months, he died within three weeks, aged 62.

Mrs Bullock later learnt that experts at King's College Hospital, London, believed Mr Bullock "would have needed to be referred for assessment for transplantation 12-18 months earlier if he were to have been given a successful transplant." Why wasn't he? Mrs Bullock set out to find out and has obtained all her husband's medical records over a 15-year period. She was devastated by what she found.

Although Mr Bullock was diagnosed in 1983 with what was then known as "non A non B hepatitis" and his exposure to blood products was noted, his records then change to include comments like "probable alcoholic cirrhosis" and "chronic high alcohol consumption".

Mrs Bullock says her husband never drank more than the odd glass of wine with Sunday lunch. "It was most distressing to both my children and myself to find my husband being accused of being an alcoholic over a period of 13 years following his contamination. Nothing could have been further from the truth. I cannot forgive this defamation."

Mrs Bullock wonders if these incorrect records, which by implication blame his condition on alcohol abuse, influenced the delay in putting him forward for transplant. She has complained to St Thomas's Hospital, London, where he was being treated, to the health ombudsman and to the General Medical Council which so far have all rejected her concerns.

Mrs Bullock, along with an estimated 200 other widows and families of haemophiliacs who have died of liver cancer or failure, are to be excluded from health secretary John Reid's "compassion" money (just £20,000 to £45,000) for those whose lives were devastated by being given bad blood.

The government is still trying to deny official responsibility "because so little was known about the condition at the time of infection". Except that documents unearthed by Haemophilia Action have shown that those working with haemophiliacs had been linking their patients with suspect batches of blood from the US since the early 1970s.

Mrs Bullock believes her husband was one of those haemophiliacs who were secretly tested for hepatitis C in 1991 and not told the results (*Eyes passim*). She has not given up her fight. She has now complained again to the GMC, which is investigating Mr Bullock's case.

POLICE 5

Trial by media

SO home office ministers believe that press self-regulation will stop the tabloids naming and shaming innocent people suspected of sexual offences even before they have been arrested or charged.

Twice they rejected House of Lords' amendments to the sexual offences bill (brought in the wake of the naming of a number of blameless celebrities) which would only have allowed identification of a suspect *after* criminal charges had been bought.

But one less celebrated man who is keenly aware of the failure of self-regulation is 83-year-old solicitor Ivan Geffen, the human rights lawyer who represented two of the Birmingham Six and who had long been a thorn in the side of West Midlands police.

In June 2000 a woman complained to police that Geffen had tried to abuse her six-year-old child. An investigation found the claim to be groundless. But by then West Midlands police had begun a full-scale paedophile investigation. At the end of July 2000, in the full glare of publicity, Geffen was arrested at his flat in Walsall. His home and offices were searched and his computers seized. It was reported that a quantity of pornographic material had been found. It turned out to be innocent family snapshots, although of course that was never reported.

When he was taken to be charged, journalists were tipped off and were there to capture the event on camera. In court, however in June 2002, police offered no further evidence and Geffen was formally acquitted of all allegations against him. Strangely, this attracted only a small amount of publicity.

TOBACCO SMUGGLING

SMOKE AND MIRRORS

WHAT has happened to the government's investigation into tobacco smuggling? More than three years ago Stephen Byers, then trade and industry secretary, announced an inquiry into allegations that British American Tobacco (BAT) is, or was, involved in smuggling tobacco.

The findings were expected last year but have still not been published. One matter the report may not investigate too closely is the constantly spinning revolving door between the DTI and BAT and its regular use by DTI officials and BAT executives.

In 1997 Ray Mingay left his job as director-general of the DTI's export promotion department and the following year got a new job as a paid adviser to BAT. The appointment was approved by the advisory committee that vets the appointment of top civil servants to commercial firms.

When freelance journalist Bruce Whitehead asked BAT if Mr Mingay would have anything to do with the tobacco smuggling inquiry, the answer was: no. He was told Mr Mingay did not intercede with the DTI on behalf of the company.

Whoops! Documents filed in a Minnesota case brought by the US justice department include an email from BAT's public relations chief Martin Summers on 26 September, a few days before the DTI inquiry was set up, as follows: "MS (Martin Summers) will ensure that Ray Mingay speaks to DTI on the day of the announcement (if inquiry launched) as to the protocols surrounding companies under investigation."

Ray Mingay is not the only DTI official to take the revolving door to BAT. In 1998 Nicola Shears, a former DTI civil servant in the same department as Mr Mingay, moved to BAT and is now international trade issues manager. She also advises the Confederation of British Industry's international trade development committee.

The revolving door works both ways of course. In 2001 Mark Jennings, former president of BAT's operations in south-east Asia, was "seconded" to the export promotions department of the DTI – the same department that once employed Mr Mingay and Ms Shears. Jennings' job there was to advise British firms on exporting to Turkey, Bulgaria and Romania, all key target markets for BAT.

He held that job all through 2001 as the government department to which he was "seconded" was investigating the firm which employed him. Asked why it took on Mr Jennings while his firm was being investigated, a DTI spokesman said: "Secondees bring valuable skills and experience to the work of the DTI. It is made clear in the conditions of any secondment that there should be no conflicts of interest between work for the department and for an employer. Additionally, secondees should not make use of or disclose any information they have received in confidence in the course of the secondment."

PS: Last summer prime minister Tony Blair took a holiday in a house in France owned by Alain Dominique Perrin, a major shareholder in British American Tobacco.

High pressure at the Met

PETER EWINS, chief executive of the Met Office (the weather wing of the Ministry of Defence), has been bemoaning a "difficult trading year" and confessing to missing both sales and efficiency targets. Could this have anything to do with the fact that expensive, precision Met Office equipment has somehow been finding its way on to the open market at remarkable knockdown prices?

Unique Met Office barometers (PABs), said to be worth around £30,000 apiece, can be picked up for less than £200 from Helmut Singer, a dealer in secondhand test, communications and scientific equipment based in Germany.

Around 300 (worth £9m to the taxpayer), once used by the navy, air force and at civilian airfields, are believed to be on the market.

Paul Wynter, head of Skycom Telecom, regularly trades with the MoD. He bought four such barometers from the German company and then applied to the Met Office to have them recalibrated. Until that moment it seems the Met Office had no idea the barometers were even missing. Wynter says he was outraged to find he was suddenly under investigation by MoD police when the barometers were openly and legitimately for sale.

This is apparently not the first time there have been storage and sales equipment cock-ups at the Met Office. "We cannot comment because an investigation is underway," said a spokeswoman. "And that applies to no matter what question you ask."

Some of the precision PABs are still being advertised for sale on the web. Seems it's time for the national audit office (NAO) to take a look.

E-COMMERCE

It all InterAds up

NEWS reaches the *Eye* that all may not be well at the Office of the e-Envoy (OeE), now part of the cabinet office. It has even been suggested that the prime minister's ambition to get all government services online by 2005 may have to be drastically scaled back.

There is also a rumour that the e-envoy office boss, Andrew Pinder, appointed by Tony Blair in 2001, may not keep his job after his contract expires. The *Eye* asked the cabinet office about this. A spokeswoman told us that Mr Pinder's contract runs until next April and that "succession planning decisions will not be made until closer to that date".

The *Eye* also asked about a full-time employee at the office, former Citibank computer contractor Simon Freeman, whose grand title is eDelivery Team Head of Connective Technologies, and his private computer company, InterAds. We asked: "Is one of Mr Freeman's jobs to hire contractors to do work for the OeE?"

The spokeswoman replied: "No. Decisions on such recruitments are taken by the eDelivery Team's commercial and financial manager. Those decisions follow a documented recruitment process for non-civil servants, which always involves competition between different potential suppliers of contractors."

And what about InterAds? The spokeswoman explained: "OeE contact is with Computacenter and not with InterAds or Mr Freeman. The eDelivery Team has used the Computacenter framework for hiring contractors and InterAds is a company that is on their supplier list." The *Eye* then asked if any contracts had gone to InterAds. The reply was: "The office of the E-envoy has used contractors from InterAds although the contractual relationship is with Computacenter, not directly with InterAds." How many contracts had gone to Mr Freeman's company and how much were they worth? Back came a familiar reply: "Information relating to the value of the contracts is commercial in confidence" – ie shut up: that's a secret.

Asked what precautions the Office of the e-Envoy took against conflicts of interest that might arise if staff are involved in companies negotiating for contracts, the spokeswoman explained: "OeE staff are bound by the cabinet office management code which requires them to declare any real or perceived conflicts of interest to their line manager at senior civil service level... Procurement processes are overseen by the OeE's procurement management team to ensure probity, transparency and auditability." So that's all right, then.

FOLLOW-UPS... FOLLOW-UPS... FOLLOW-UPS...FOLLOW-UPS...FOLLOW-UPS...

■ **CAFCASS**: More trouble for beleaguered children's minister Margaret Hodge as Cafcass, the troubled children and family court service, comes cap-in-hand to her seeking an extra £5m.

It needs the cash to help vulnerable children in care or at the centre of family disputes, many of whom are waiting many weeks to be allocated guardians to represent their interests.

In the meantime MPs want to know when calls from a Commons committee for improved management, computer systems and individual case management will be acted on and when the national audit office (NAO) investigation into the hasty setting up of Cafcass will be made public.

■ **BLANTYRE HOUSE**: Eion McLennan-Murray, the prison governor forced out and demoted as part of the spectacularly botched raid on his much-praised jail, Blantyre House, has finally been given stewardship of another jail.

McLennan-Murray took over Lewes prison in Sussex last month. But his dispute with the prison service is still not over. He has never received an apology for his shoddy treatment or for the home office investigation into his complaints into the affair which a high court judge said was "irrational" and "went beyond the unimpressive".

He is now seeking the return of his legal costs incurred in proving what everyone knew: namely that he was being bullied by his then area manager Tom Murtagh, who didn't like the humane (and successful) resettlement regime being employed at Blantyre and who wanted McLennan-Murray out.

■ **ASBESTOS DEATHS**: Vast sums are being earned by the lawyers and accountants winding up Federal Mogul's asbestos concerns, while the company's victims – many sick and dying from mesothelioma, a painful asbestos-related cancer – still haven't received a penny.

Eye readers will recall that the US giant promptly declared itself bankrupt after buying up the UK's Turner and Newhall (which was supposed to compensate hundreds of workers poisoned by asbestos at its JW Roberts factory). Payments to the sick stopped immediately – one victim's cheque for several thousand pounds bounced – and all court action was halted until the bankruptcy process is finished.

Now the MP John Battle, who has long championed the cause of the victims and their families, has learnt that a staggering $75m was paid last year to those winding-up Federal Mogul. The UK administrator alone was paid £465 per hour, while his legal team got a total of £24m.

Compare that to the small legal team fighting for compensation for the victims. Like the victims themselves they have received nothing and have been giving their time free of charge.

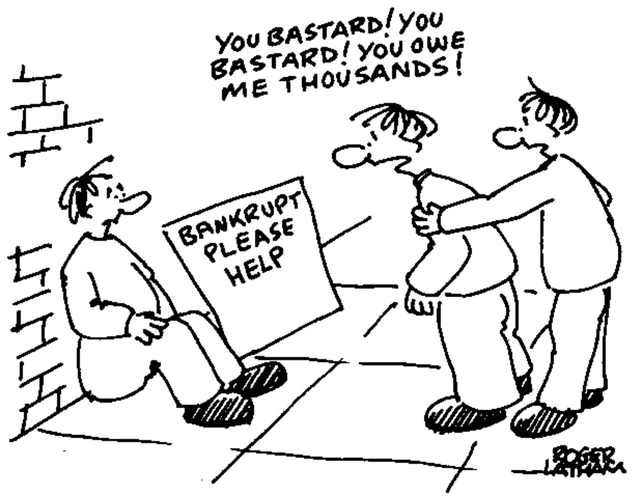
As Battle told the *Eye*: "Minutes of meetings of JW Roberts directors back in the 1930s show they decided that the quality of life of the people near their factory was so unimportant that they wouldn't bother to filter the asbestos waste blowing out of their chimney. It seems that same attitude lives on 70 years later."

In the City

NOBODY could accuse Lord Black of short-changing himself when it comes to enjoying the benefits of being a company director. But Black is far more careful when it comes to his employees, such as those at West Ferry Printers – Europe's biggest printing plant, jointly owned with would-be Telegraph buyer Richard "Dirty" Desmond.

The highly profitable West Ferry has a growing deficit in its pension scheme – £9m in 2001 and £32m last year. However, Black and Desmond are in no rush to provide for this shortfall. Because the accountancy standard requiring companies to make provision for any pension fund shortfall is not mandatory until 2005, West Ferry merely identifies the deficit problem without taking any hit in its balance sheet. Both Black and Desmond have substantial debt burdens so need all the boost they can get from such an investment.

The latest 2002 accounts for Desmond's master company RCD1 disclosed a pension shortfall at Express Newspapers of £23m compared with a previous small surplus. But as at West Ferry, Desmond is in no rush to make any provision in the accounts while paying a mere £20m into his own personal pension.



Insolvent Abuse

Black and Desmond, who previously battled over who should buy out whom from West Ferry, have joined forces in extracting rather than injecting cash. Since January 2002 the Telegraph and Express groups have not only shared £12m in dividends from West Ferry but also borrowed £3.5m each from the company.

With profits of £13m from printing not just the *Telegraph* and *Express* titles but also the *Financial Times* and the *Guardian/Observer,* it would be no surprise if Desmond would be more than happy to settle for full control of West Ferry should a bid for the Telegraph fail.

Meanwhile, only a man as pompous as Black could have told the *Sunday Times* in 1992 that: "My treatment of minority shareholders and my financial ethics have never been questioned" (see page 3). Such comments flew in the face of his reputation in Canada and the US as an aggressive businessman who played hardball and would have difficulty spelling the word selfless.

Last week it was revealed Black had paid himself and his close aides almost half the $32m in undisclosed and unauthorised payments which have forced his resignation as Hollinger International chief executive. Up to $300m in compensation and non-compete fees paid since 1995 are now under scrutiny from both Hollinger shareholders and regulators in the US and Canada.

But a previous run-in with the securities and exchange commission (SEC) watchdog could well come back to haunt Black 21 years later as the SEC now gets its newly-sharpened teeth into the Hollinger non-disclosures.

Back in 1982 Black consented to an agreement with the SEC, without admitting any wrongdoing, to refrain from violating securities laws, including the shareholder reporting provisions. But Hollinger has already had to admit that it breached those regulations by not disclosing the $32m including $7.2m pocketed by Black under the spurious guise of non-compete payments – payments that normally go to the company, not its directors.

Back in 1982 the SEC claimed his company Norcen Energy Resource had misrepresented its purpose in acquiring shares in Hanna Mining, saying it was an investment when in fact Black planned a takeover. The SEC alleged Norcen tried to conceal its attempt to takeover Hanna and failed to file the required forms with the commission.

The SEC was backed by federal judge John Manos who issued an injunction banning any bid by Black for Hanna. Manos ruled that Black had "unlawfully manipulated" the Hanna price. A bid had been contemplated long before it had been announced and investors had probably relied on Norcen's statements that it was not a bidder. This had depressed the Hanna price enabling Black to buy more shares before revealing his true intentions. Black made attempts to buy more shares or line up supporters while telling the SEC and other investors that he had no ambitions for control. Manos accepted this amounted to fraud and deceit. Black denied the charges and appealed the Manos judgment but the dispute with Hanna was settled before the appeal was heard.

Black is now a two-time loser as far as the SEC is concerned. In the current climate for better corporate governance – something Black denounced earlier this year as a "fad" – this may have very serious consequences.

BLACK has been a supporter of President George "Dubya" Bush (influential neo-con hawk Richard Perle is a Hollinger director) who also has had past problems with the SEC.

He failed to notify regulators that he had sold shares in oil company Harken Energy, where he was a director, in 1990 shortly before it revealed a large loss. But then the Bush family has a history of association with failed businesses and unusual partners amid allegations of influence peddling and presidential name dropping.

Brother Neil Bush was a director of Silverado, a Denver savings and loan company which had to be rescued by the US taxpayer at a cost of $1bn in 1988, days after his daddy George Bush became president. Neil paid $50,000 in 1991 to settle proceedings brought by federal regulators who accused him and other Silverado directors of being "grossly negligent". Neil Bush now runs educational software company Ignite which could benefit from policies endorsed by President Dubya and their brother Jeb, the governor of Florida. It was denied this month that Taiwan's president paid $1m to meet Neil Bush in New York – one of Ignite's investors is an influential Taiwanese businessman.

Jeb Bush was a well-paid director of credit card marketer Ideon which became a financial disaster and spawned a myriad shareholder lawsuits before it was sold.

Brother Marvin Bush resigned almost a year ago from Fresh Del Monte, the fruit importer once part of Asil Nadir's collapsed Polly Peck empire. His resignation followed a law suit claiming the company was sold by the Mexican government – which had taken over the company from its Mexican purchaser when he, like Nadir, went on the run with $700m missing – in 1996 at a big under-valuation after the payment of a $321,000 bribe to a government official by the Chilean IAT group. IAT denied any bribe. Bush was not named in the action but joined after the deal.

Marvin and Neil had both been in Kuwait soon after the first Gulf war hustling for business on the back of the Arab goodwill for daddy George. "Dubya" also benefited from daddy's influence. The tiny Harken Energy was awarded drilling rights in Bahrain despite the fact that it had no experience of drilling offshore or overseas.

The most colourful Bush business involvement though concerns Prescott Bush, uncle of the present president. He became the – one must imagine unknowing – business associate of the boss of Japan's second biggest Yakuza mob soon after his brother became president.

Prescott Bush was hired in 1989 as a consultant to West Tsusho, a Tokyo-based investment company controlled by Susumu Ishii, head of the Inagawa-kai syndicate and known as the zaitech Yakuza or financial engineering mobster. Ishii was influential in the Tokyo financial markets with links to several major banks and brokers like Nomura and Nikko.

Bush was paid $250,000 commission and the promise of a $750,000 agreement for introducing West Tsusho to a Houston software company and a New York asset manager. Ishii was also linked to the Aoki construction group which hired Prescott Bush.

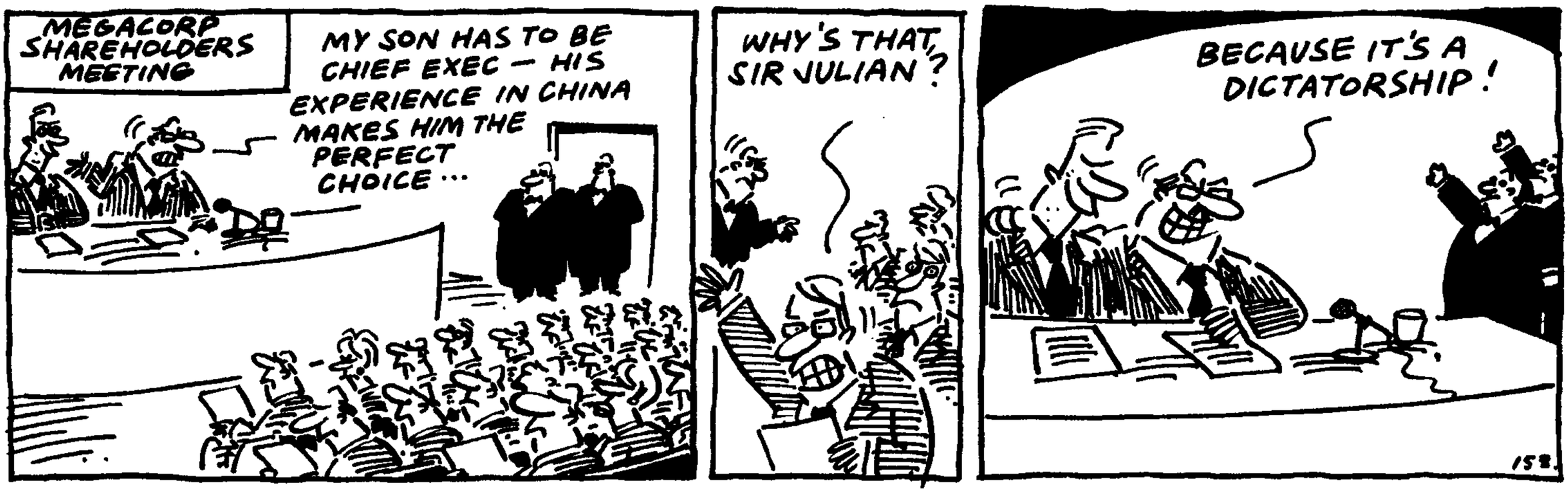
Given such a family history no wonder critics smile whenever "Dubya" talks about getting tough on business executives.

WHILE sending coded public messages encouraging democratic reforms, President Bush continues to protect his family's friends in Saudi Arabia. As a result the full details of what the US has uncovered about the financial links between powerful Saudi business interests and Islamic extremists/terrorists remain unpublished.

The Saudi authorities claim to have a list of suspect Jeddah businessmen but have so far done

THE DIRECTORS

DREDGE & RIGG


MEGACORP SHAREHOLDERS MEETING
MY SON HAS TO BE CHIEF EXEC – HIS EXPERIENCE IN CHINA MAKES HIM THE PERFECT CHOICE ...
WHY'S THAT, SIR JULIAN?
BECAUSE IT'S A DICTATORSHIP!
158.

Number crunchings

£26,000,000

■ Fortune Martha Lane Fox has made from lastminute.com

£200,000

■ Profit lastminute.com made last year, the only year it has shown a profit

nothing about it. Several of those alleged to have links, usually through Islamic charities, with al-Qaeda funding have taken to the courts in London and elsewhere to deny the allegations. The bin Mahfouz, al-Qadi and al-Rahji families are all involved in UK legal actions. Khalid bin Mahfouz, previously best known for his involvement in the Bank of Cocaine and Conmen International, is also fighting to be dismissed from the US case brought on behalf of the victims of the 9/11 attacks.

Two Saudi princes were recently dismissed from that case. However, the current status of the former royal banker in Saudi Arabia is unclear. Whether he is able to travel outside the kingdom is a matter of speculation, as is his state of health after a reported falling out with the Saudi royals which saw his departure from National Commercial Bank and public sight. But then when bin Mahfouz was sued in New York over the BCCI collapse – he settled for $220m – the banker was always too ill to appear in court before the charges were dropped.

BUSH's plans to have David Mulford, chairman of Credit Suisse First Boston International in London, appointed US ambassador to India may be running into a snag. This is a result of Mulford and Credit Suisse's involvement with brothers Carlos and Jose Rohm, who have been accused of massive bank frauds in Argentina and Uruguay.

Carlos is on trial in Argentina. Jose is a fugitive. Credit Suisse was a major shareholder in the Rohm Argentinian bank Banco General de Negocios. Early last year it emerged $250m was missing from BGN. Mulford was on the board of BGN. He resigned following news of the fraud. However, a judge in Uruguay investigating the collapse of the local Rohm bank Compania General de Negocios wants Mulford to give evidence. He and CSFB denied they had any knowledge of the Rohm's pillaging.

'Slicker'

JUST FANCY THAT!

GIBSON Square books couldn't have chosen a better time to release the paperback version of David Nasaw's biography of William Randolph Hearst, *The Chief*, with its fulsome foreword by Conrad Black, "chairman and chief executive of Hollinger" (as was).

"All his life, Hearst had a conviction, often outrageous, that the rules that applied to others didn't apply to him," writes Lord Black, a great fan of the man whose "ludicrously extravagant" lifestyle was "as close as the New World has come to the opulence of the medieval papacy and the French Bourbons".

Black does, however, allow himself some criticism of the great man: "Not defensible in the slightest was his insouciant financial mismanagement that almost caused his entire company to be bankrupt in the mid-1930s."

'Darcy's Dilemma'

Sunday, December 14th

A special day in Jane Austen's Bath.

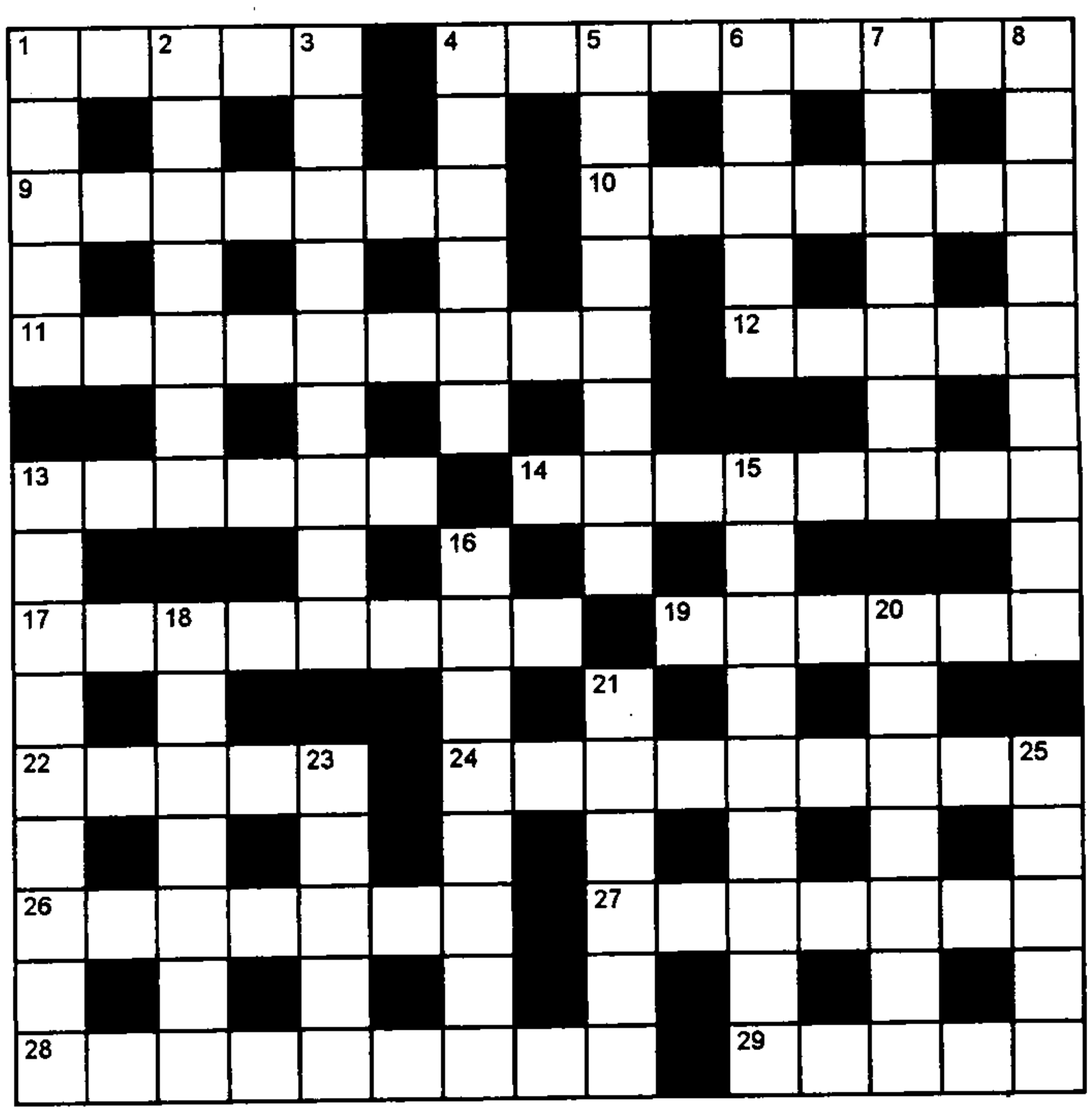
Country Neighbour (Basildon)

EYE CROSSWORD 249

by Cyclops

£100 prize to first correct solution opened on 5 December 2003.

Entries to 'Crossword', Private Eye, 6 Carlisle Street, London W1D 3BN or via email to crossword@private-eye.co.uk



ACROSS

1/26/29 Historian losing organ almost – throw back to Locke and Bent holding tip of knob (raw) (5,7-5)
4 Where to see a thin piece with clobber? The reverse (5,4)
9 Two leaders of Labour – initially oily Gordon is clowning about inside, Spock-like (7)
10 Local dish buff after backing "Britain in revolt" (3,4)
11 Alternative live comics ignoring Conservatives' no. 1, an atrocious leader (9)
12 'Star' Campbell especially liked enraging bureaucratic heads (5)
13 Arse about, getting shags in party residences (6)
14 Shagging and things: Cyclops no good (8)
17 Like a lousy type giving himself hand relief? (8)
19 Start to piss on Happy Hardy (6)
22 He screwed with git in group involved in row (5)
24 Popping zits captures ("gee it's gruesome") the spirit of our time (9)
26 See 1ac.
27 Dignitary makes poor TV without Skinner's intro (7)
28 Crap, his do (pissed – carried away) (9)
29 See 1ac.

DOWN

1 Commercial deal associated with McCarthy's first witch-hunt situation (5)
2 Bill gobbles Nigel off like one of Charlie's women? (7)
3 Thrills to slapper's sudden impulse (9)
4 Val is about to get one in gob (6)
5 Shit! Leader's gone to a financial centre – greed (8)
6 The people abandoned by Campbell finally (Bush-related?) (5)
7 Garland on "Learning to be a siren" (7)
8 Minor transport airline to close like bad software (4,5)
13 Dyke primarily exists, cock, to do a corporate hatchet job (9)
15 Adult stuffed right into dress (4-5)
16 Two unknown factors in (5,3)
18 Brenda gets them out for us to gawp at, occasionally (7)
20 Wind is a prominent feature when having nothing on, don't you agree? (7)
21 A life of a celebrity that's been shot (6)
23 Revolutionaries' uncontrollable movements (5)
25 Time Out's opener on Heath: "Bore" (5)

Crossword 248 winner: RACHEL HUNT

ACROSS: 1 Militarism 7 Jugs 9 Edit 10 Spin doctor 11 Censured 12 Albion 13 Groat 15 In the shit 18 Speed trap 19 Totty 21 Kennel 23 Sciatica 25 Compatriot 26 I-spy 27 Iffy 28 Sphincters.

DOWN: 2 Indie 3 Intestate 4 Absurd 5 Iain Duncan Smith 6 Mudbaths 7 Jacob 8 Geologist 14 Ripped off 16 Short list 17 Athletes 20 Piston 22 Nappy 24 Caper.

YOBETTES

HUSBAND

How many blokes ave you slept with?
Er.. Ten
Ten, is that all?!
I've only been 'ere 4 bleedin days!
No, no.. I meant ever
Oh sorry
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GIVE

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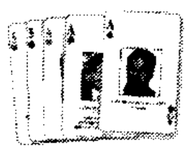

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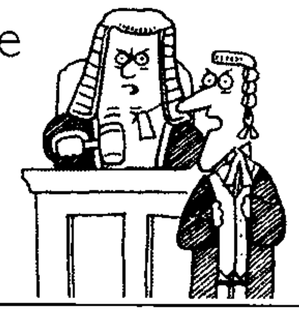

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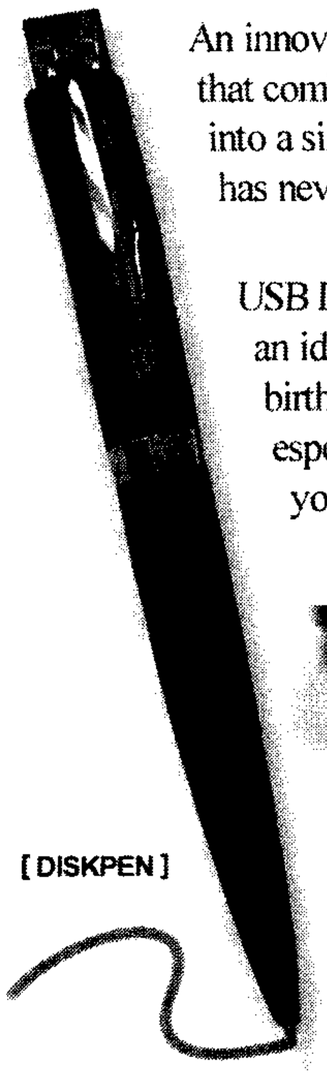
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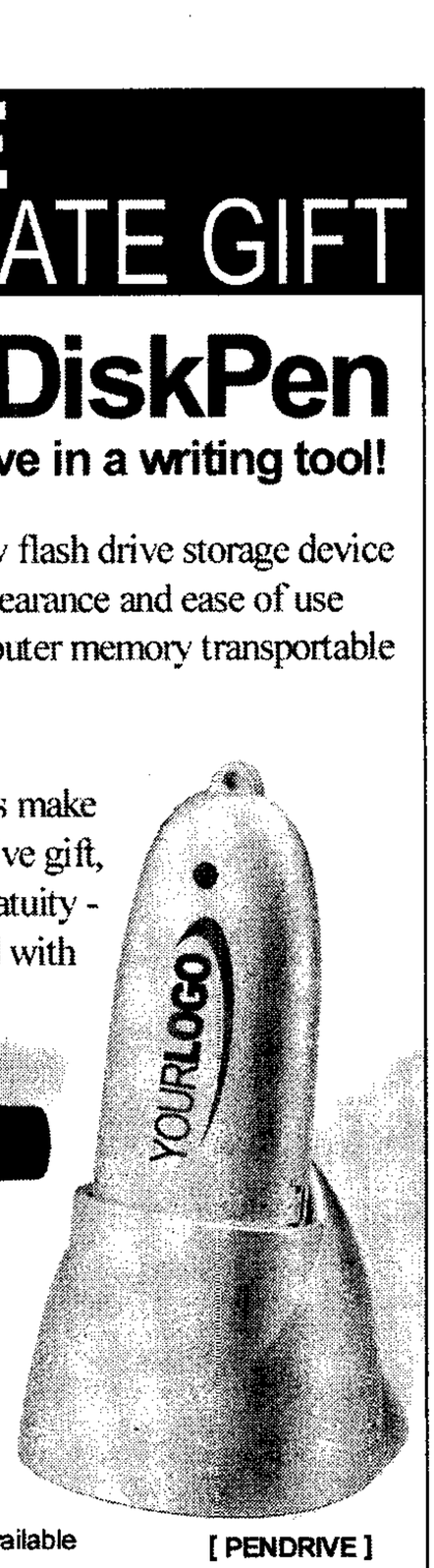

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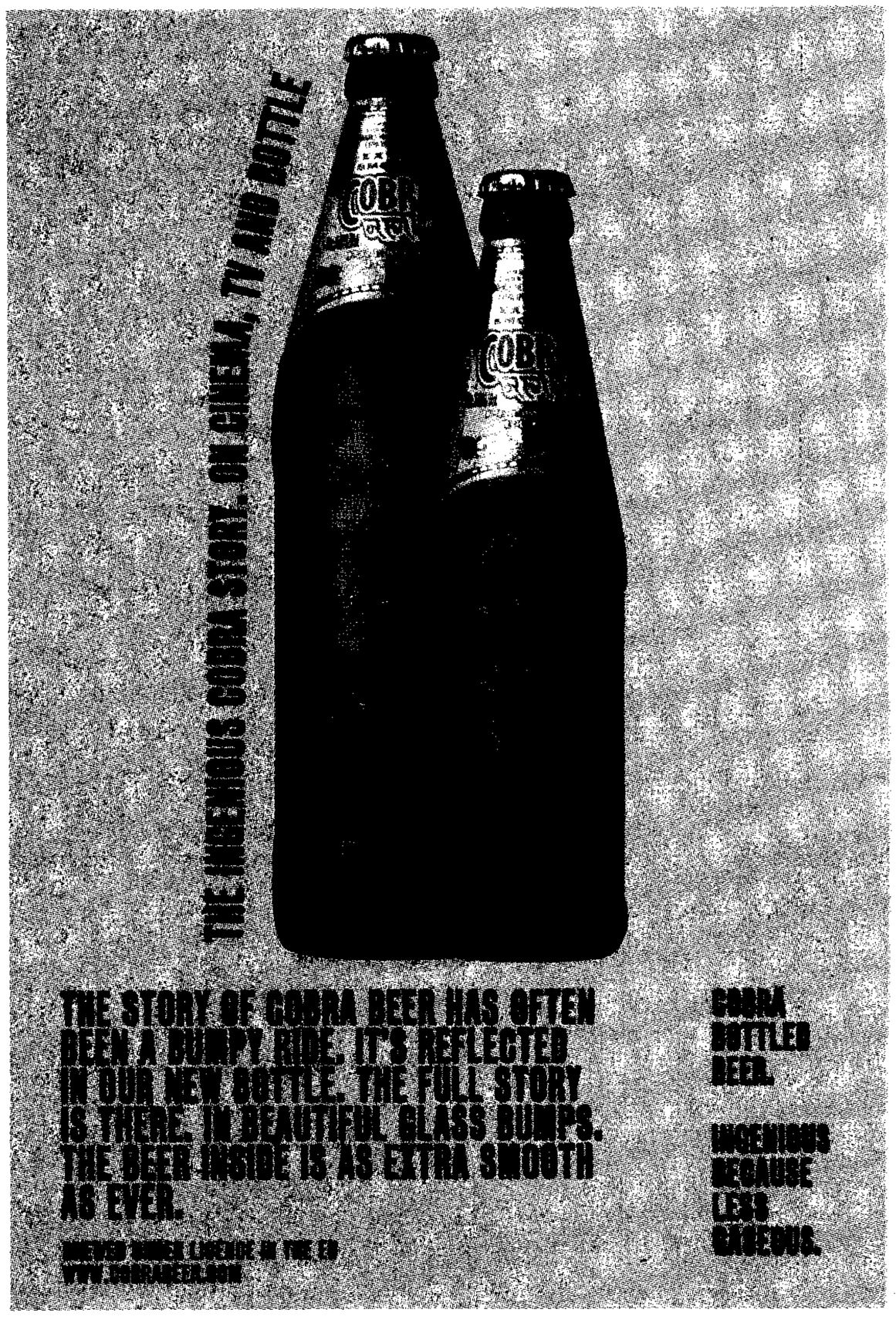
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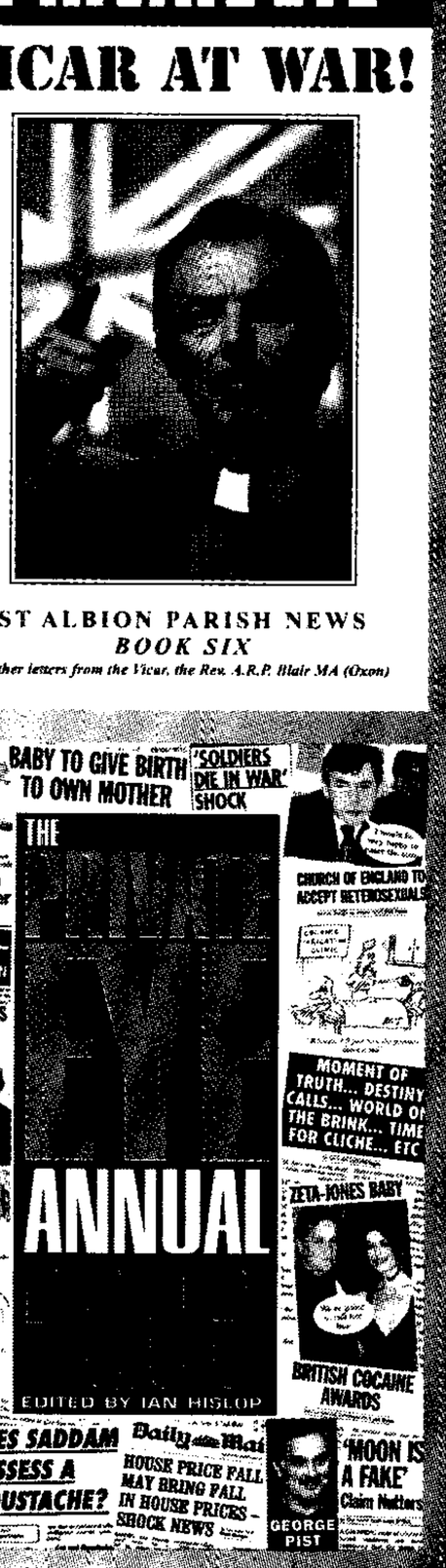
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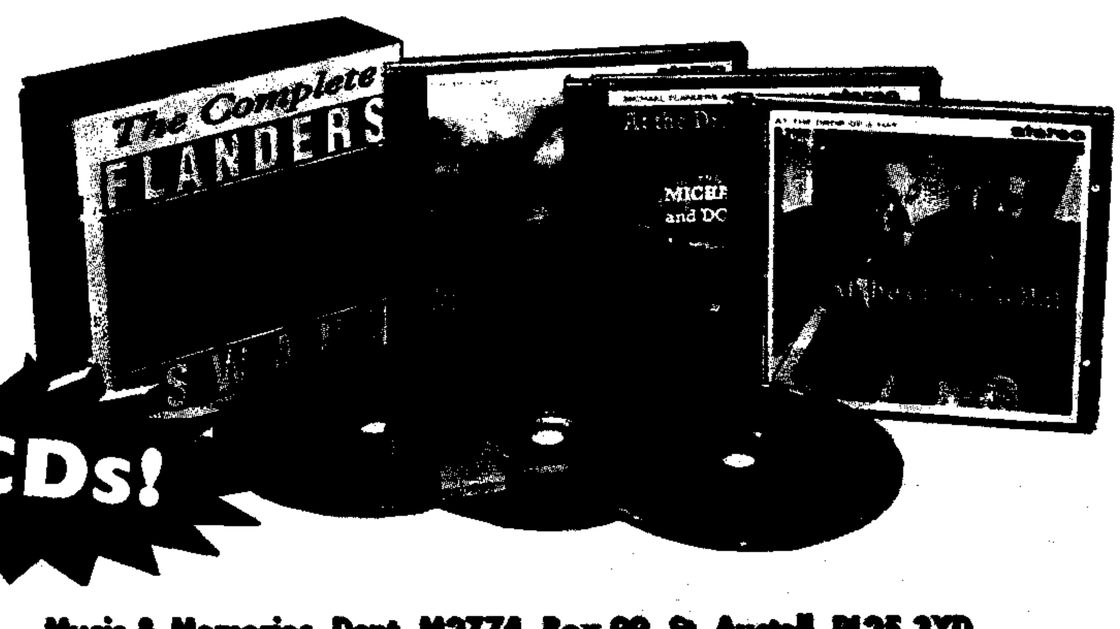

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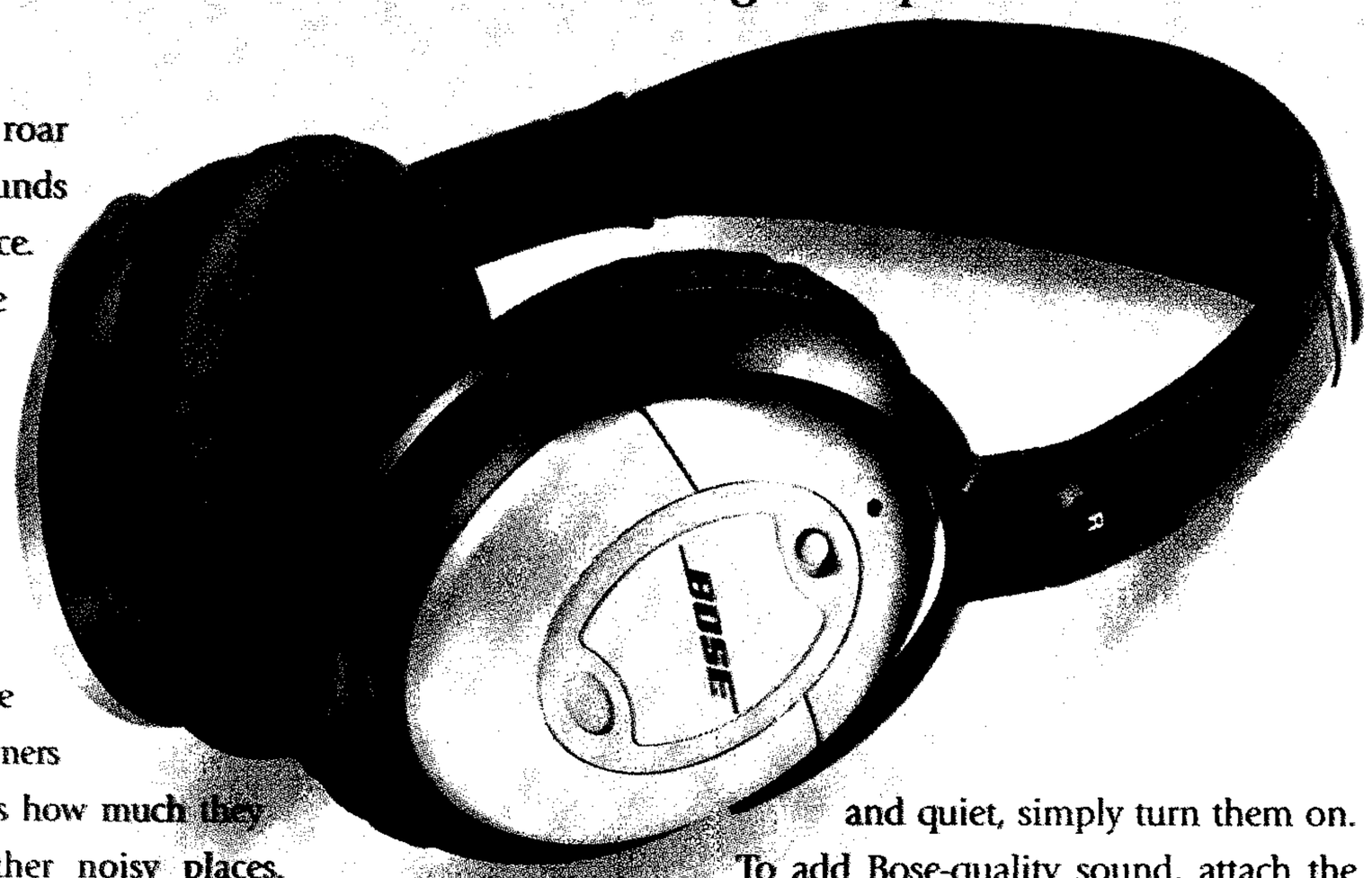

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